30¢

Reviews in A. Birrell, Men, Women & Books

Kalbfleisch

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/bwb_T3-CBR-237

HOURS IN A LIBRARY

VOL. II.

HOURS IN A LIBRARY

BY

LESLIE STEPHEN

NEW EDITION

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL II.

NEW YORK: G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
LONDON: SMITH, ELDER, & CO.
1899

CONTENTS

OF

THE SECOND VOLUME

	PAGE
Dr. Johnson's Writings	1
Crabbe	33
William Hazlitt	67
Disraeli's Novels	106
Massinger	141
Fielding's Novels	177
Cowper and Rousseau	208
The First Edinburgh Reviewers	241
Wordsworth's Ethics	270
Landor's Imaginary Conversations	308
Macaulay	343

HOURS IN A LIBRARY

DR. JOHNSON'S WRITINGS

A BOOK appeared not long ago of which it was the professed object to give to the modern generation of lazy readers the pith of Boswell's immortal biography. I shall, for sufficient reasons, refrain from discussing the merits of the performance. One remark, indeed, may be made in passing. The circle of readers to whom such a book is welcome must, of necessity, be limited. To the true lovers of Boswell it is, to say the least, superfluous ; the gentlest omissions will always mangle some people's favourite passages, and additions, whatever skill they may display, necessarily injure that dramatic vivacity which is one of the great charms of the original. The most discreet of cicerones is an intruder when we open our old favourite, and, without further magic, retire into that delicious nook of eighteenth-century society. Upon those, again, who cannot appreciate the infinite humour of the original, the mere excision of the less lively pages will be thrown away. There remains only that narrow margin of readers whose appetites, languid but not extinct, can be titillated by the promise that they shall not have the trouble of making their own selection. Let us

wish them good digestions, and, in spite of modern changes of fashion, more robust taste for the future. I would still hope that to many readers Boswell has been what he has certainly been to some, the first writer who gave them a love of English literature, and the most charming of all companions long after the bloom of novelty has departed. I subscribe most cheerfully to Mr. Lewes's statement that he estimates his acquaintances according to their estimate of Boswell. A man, indeed, may be a good Christian and an excellent father of a family, without loving Johnson or Boswell, for a sense of humour is not one of the primary virtues. But Boswell's is one of the very few books which, after many years of familiarity, will still provoke a hearty laugh even in the solitude of a study; and the laughter is of that kind which does one good.

I do not wish, however, to pronounce one more eulogy upon an old friend, but to say a few words on a question which he sometimes suggests. Macaulay's well-known but provoking essay is more than usually lavish in overstrained paradoxes. He has explicitly declared that Boswell wrote one of the most charming of books because he was one of the greatest of fools. And his remarks suggest, if they do not implicitly assert, that Johnson wrote some of the most unreadable of books, although, if not because, he possessed one of the most vigorous intellects of the time. Carlyle has given a sufficient explanation of the first paradox; but the second may justify a little further inquiry. As a general rule, the talk of a great man is the reflection of his books. Nothing is so false as the common saying that the presence of a distinguished writer is generally disappointing. It exemplifies a very common delusion. People are so

impressed by the disparity which sometimes occurs, that they take the exception for the rule. It is, of course, true that a man's verbal utterances may differ materially from his written utterances. He may, like Addison, be shy in company ; he may, like many retired students, be slow in collecting his thoughts ; or he may, like Goldsmith, be over-anxious to shine at all hazards. But a patient observer will even then detect the essential identity under superficial differences ; and in the majority of cases, as in that of Macaulay himself, the talking and the writing are palpably and almost absurdly similar. The whole art of criticism consists in learning to know the human being who is partially revealed to us in his spoken or his written words. Whatever the means of communication, the problem is the same. The two methods of inquiry may supplement each other ; but their substantial agreement is the test of their accuracy. If Johnson, as a writer, appears to us to be a mere windbag and manufacturer of sesquipedalian verbiage, whilst, as a talker, he appears to be one of the most genuine and deeply feeling of men, we may be sure that our analysis has been somewhere defective. The discrepancy is, of course, partly explained by the faults of Johnson's style ; but the explanation only removes the difficulty a degree further. 'The style is the man' is a very excellent aphorism, though some eminent writers have lately pointed out that Buffon's original remark was *le style c'est de l'homme*. That only proves that, like many other good sayings, it has been polished and brought to perfection by the process of attrition in numerous minds, instead of being struck out at a blow by a solitary thinker. From a purely logical point of view, Buffon may be correct ; but the very essence of an aphorism is that slight exaggeration which makes it more

biting whilst less rigidly accurate. According to Buffon, the style might belong to a man as an acquisition rather than to natural growth. There are parasitical writers who, in the old phrase, have 'formed their style' by the imitation of accepted models, and who have, therefore, possessed it only by right of appropriation. Boswell has a discussion as to the writers who may have served Johnson in this capacity. But, in fact, Johnson, like all other men of strong idiosyncrasy, formed his style as he formed his legs. The peculiarities of his limbs were in some degree the result of conscious efforts in walking, swimming, and 'buffeting with his books.' This development was doubtless more fully determined by the constitution which he brought into the world, and the circumstances under which he was brought up. And even that queer Johnsonese, which Macaulay supposes him to have adopted in accordance with a more definite literary theory, will probably appear to be the natural expression of certain innate tendencies, and of the mental atmosphere which he breathed from youth. To appreciate fairly the strangely cumbrous form of his written speech, we must penetrate more deeply than may at first sight seem necessary beneath the outer rind of this literary Behemoth. The difficulty of such spiritual dissection is, indeed, very great ; but some little light may be thrown upon the subject by following out such indications as we possess.

The talking Johnson is sufficiently familiar to us. So far as Boswell needs an interpreter, Carlyle has done all that can be done. He has concentrated and explained what is diffused, and often unconsciously indicated in Boswell's pages. When reading Boswell, we are half ashamed of his power over our sympathies. It is like turn-

ing over a portfolio of sketches, caricatured, inadequate, and each giving only some imperfect aspect of the original. Macaulay's smart paradoxes only increase our perplexity by throwing the superficial contrasts into stronger relief. Carlyle, with true imaginative insight, gives us at once the essence of Johnson ; he brings before our eyes the luminous body of which we have previously been conscious only by a series of imperfect images refracted through a number of distorting media. To render such a service effectually is the highest triumph of criticism ; and it would be impertinent to say again in feebler language what Carlyle has expressed so forcibly. We may, however, recall certain general conclusions by way of preface to the problem which he has not expressly considered, how far Johnson succeeded in expressing himself through his writings.

The world, as Carlyle sees it, is composed, we all know, of two classes : there are 'the dull millions, who, as a dull flock, roll hither and thither, whithersoever they are led,' and there are a few superior natures who can see and can will. There are, in other words, the heroes, and those whose highest wisdom is to be hero-worshippers. Johnson's glory is that he belonged to the sacred band, though he could not claim within it the highest, or even a very high, rank. In the current dialect, therefore, he was 'no-wise a clothes-horse or patent digester, but a genuine man.' Whatever the accuracy of the general doctrine, or of certain corollaries which are drawn from it, the application to Johnson explains one main condition of his power. Persons of colourless imagination may hold—nor will we dispute their verdict—that Carlyle overcharges his lights and shades, and brings his heroes into too startling a contrast with the vulgar herd. Yet it is undeniable that the

great bulk of mankind are transmitters rather than originators of spiritual force. Most of us are necessarily condemned to express our thoughts in formulas which we have learnt from others and can but slightly tinge with our feeble personality. Nor, as a rule, are we even consistent disciples of any one school of thought. What we call our opinions are mere bundles of incoherent formulæ, arbitrarily stitched together because our reasoning faculties are too dull to make inconsistency painful. Of the vast piles of books which load our libraries, ninety-nine hundredths and more are but printed echoes : and it is the rarest of pleasures to say, Here is a distinct record of impressions at first hand. We commonplace beings are hurried along in the crowd, living from hand to mouth on such slices of material and spiritual food as happen to drift in our direction, with little more power of taking an independent course, or of forming any general theory, than the polyps which are carried along by an oceanic current. Ask any man what he thinks of the world in which he is placed : whether, for example, it is on the whole a scene of happiness or misery, and he will either answer by some cut-and-dried fragments of what was once wisdom, or he will confine himself to a few incoherent details. He had a good dinner to-day and a bad toothache yesterday, and a family affliction or blessing the day before. But he is as incapable of summing up his impressions as an infant of performing an operation in the differential calculus. It is as rare as it is refreshing to find a man who can stand on his own legs and be conscious of his own feelings, who is sturdy enough to react as well as to transmit action, and lofty enough to raise himself above the hurrying crowd and have some distinct belief as to whence it is coming and whither it is going. Now Johnson, as one of

the sturdiest of mankind, had the power due to a very distinct sentiment, if not to a very clear theory, about the world in which he lived. It had buffeted him severely enough, and he had formed a decisive estimate of its value. He was no man to be put off with mere phrases in place of opinions, or to accept doctrines which were not capable of expressing genuine emotion. To this it must be added that his emotions were as deep and tender as they were genuine. How sacred was his love for his old and ugly wife; how warm his sympathy wherever it could be effective; how manly the self-respect with which he guarded his dignity through all the temptations of Grub Street, need not be once more pointed out. Perhaps, however, it is worth while to notice the extreme rarity of such qualities. Many people, we think, love their fathers. Fortunately, that is true; but in how many people is filial affection strong enough to overpower the dread of eccentricity? How many men would have been capable of doing penance in Uttoxeter market years after their father's death for a long-past act of disobedience? Most of us, again, would have a temporary emotion of pity for an outcast lying helplessly in the street. We should call the police, or send her in a cab to the workhouse, or, at least, write to the *Times* to denounce the defective arrangements of public charity. But it is perhaps better not to ask how many good Samaritans would take her on their shoulders to their own homes, care for her wants, and put her into a better way of life.

In the lives of most eminent men we find much good feeling and honourable conduct; but it is an exception, even in the case of good men, when we find that a life has been shaped by other than the ordinary conventions, or that emotions have dared to overflow the well-worn channels of

respectability. The love which we feel for Johnson is due to the fact that the pivots upon which his life turned are invariably noble motives, and not mere obedience to custom. More than one modern writer has expressed a fraternal affection for Addison, and it is justified by the kindly humour which breathes through his 'Essays.' But what anecdote of that most decorous and successful person touches our hearts or has the heroic ring of Johnson's wrestlings with adverse fortune? Addison showed how a Christian could die—when his life has run smoothly through pleasant places, secretaryships of state, and marriages with countesses, and when nothing—except a few overdoses of port wine—has shaken his nerves or ruffled his temper. A far deeper emotion rises at the deathbed of the rugged old pilgrim, who has fought his way to peace in spite of troubles within and without, who has been jeered in Vanity Fair and has descended into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and escaped with pain and difficulty from the clutches of Giant Despair. When the last feelings of such a man are tender, solemn, and simple, we feel ourselves in a higher presence than that of an amiable gentleman who simply died, as he lived, with consummate decorum.

On turning, however, from Johnson's life to his writings, from Boswell to the 'Rambler,' it must be admitted that the shock is trying to our nerves. The 'Rambler' has, indeed, high merits. The impression which it made upon his own generation proves the fact; for the reputation, however temporary, was not won by a concession to the fashions of the day, but to the influence of a strong judgment uttering itself through uncouth forms. The melancholy which colours its pages is the melancholy of a noble nature. The tone of thought reminds us of Bishop Butler,

whose writings, defaced by a style even more tiresome, though less pompous than Johnson's, have owed their enduring reputation to a philosophical acuteness in which Johnson was certainly very deficient. Both of these great men, however, impress us by their deep sense of the evils under which humanity suffers, and their rejection of the superficial optimism of the day. Butler's sadness, undoubtedly, is that of a recluse, and Johnson's that of a man of the world ; but the sentiment is fundamentally the same. It may be added, too, that here, as elsewhere, Johnson speaks with the sincerity of a man drawing upon his own experience. He announces himself as a scholar thrust out upon the world rather by necessity than choice ; and a large proportion of the papers dwell upon the various sufferings of the literary class. Nobody could speak more feelingly of those sufferings, as no one had a closer personal acquaintance with them. But allowing to Johnson whatever credit is due to the man who performs one more variation on the old theme, *Vanitas vanitatum*, we must in candour admit that the 'Rambler' has the one unpardonable fault : it is unreadable.

What an amazing turn it shows for commonplaces ! That life is short, that marriages from mercenary motives produce unhappiness, that different men are virtuous in different degrees, that advice is generally ineffectual, that adversity has its uses, that fame is liable to suffer from detraction ;— these and a host of other such maxims are of the kind upon which no genius and no depth of feeling can confer a momentary interest. Here and there, indeed, the pompous utterance invests them with an unlucky air of absurdity. 'Let no man from this time,' is the comment in one of his stories, 'suffer his felicity to depend on the death of his aunt.' Every actor, of course, uses the same dialect. A

gay young gentleman tells us that he used to amuse his companions by giving them notice of his friends' oddities. 'Every man,' he says, 'has some habitual contortion of body, or established mode of expression, which never fails to excite mirth if it be pointed out to notice. By premonition of these particularities, I secured our pleasantry.' The feminine characters, Flirtillas, and Cleoras, and Euphelias, and Penthesileas, are, if possible, still more grotesque. Macaulay remarks that he wears the petticoat with as ill a grace as Falstaff himself. The reader, he thinks, will cry out with Sir Hugh, 'I like not when a 'oman has a great peard! I spy a great peard under her muffler.' Oddly enough Johnson gives the very same quotation; and goes on to warn his supposed correspondents that Phyllis must send no more letters from the Horse Guards; and that Belinda must 'resign her pretensions to female elegance till she has lived three weeks without hearing the politics of Button's Coffee House.' The Doctor was probably sensible enough of his own defects. And yet there is a still more wearisome set of articles. In emulation of the precedent set by Addison, Johnson indulges in the dreariest of allegories. Criticism, we are told, was the eldest daughter of Labour and Truth, but at last resigned in favour of Time, and left Prejudice and False Taste to reign in company with Fraud and Mischief. Then we have the genealogy of Wit and Learning, and of Satire, the Son of Wit and Malice, and an account of their various quarrels, and the decision of Jupiter. Neither are the histories of such semi-allegorical personages as Almamoulin, the son of Nouradin, or of Anningait and Ayut, the Greenland lovers, much more refreshing to modern readers. That Johnson possessed humour of no mean order, we know from Boswell; but no

critic could have divined his power from the clumsy gambols in which he occasionally recreates himself. Perhaps his happiest effort is a dissertation upon the advantage of living in garrets ; but the humour struggles and gasps dreadfully under the weight of words. 'There are,' he says, 'some who would continue blockheads' (the Alpine Club was not yet founded), 'even on the summit of the Andes or the Peak of Teneriffe. But let not any man be considered as unimprovable till this potent remedy has been tried ; for perhaps he was found to be great only in a garret, as the joiner of Aretæus was rational in no other place but his own shop.'

How could a man of real power write such unendurable stuff? Or how, indeed, could any man come to embody his thoughts in the style of which one other sentence will be a sufficient example? As it is afterwards nearly repeated, it may be supposed to have struck his fancy. The remarks of the philosophers who denounce temerity are, he says, 'too just to be disputed and too salutary to be rejected ; but there is likewise some danger lest timorous prudence should be inculcated till courage and enterprise are wholly repressed and the mind congested in perpetual inactivity by the fatal influence of frigorifick wisdom.' Is there not some danger, we ask, that the mind will be benumbed into perpetual torpidity by the influence of this soporific sapience? It is still true, however, that this Johnsonese, so often burlesqued and ridiculed, was, as far as we can judge, a genuine product. Macaulay says that it is more offensive than the mannerism of Milton or Burke, because it is a mannerism adopted on principle and sustained by constant effort. Facts do not confirm the theory. Milton's prose style seems to be the result of a conscious effort to run

English into classical moulds. Burke's mannerism does not appear in his early writings, and we can trace its development from the imitation of Bolingbroke to the last declamation against the Revolution. But Johnson seems to have written Johnsonese from his cradle. In his first original composition, the preface to Father Lobo's 'Abyssinia,' the style is as distinctive as in the 'Rambler.' The Parliamentary reports in the 'Gentleman's Magazine' make Pitt and Fox[1] express sentiments which are probably their own in language which is as unmistakably Johnson's. It is clear that his style, good or bad, was the same from his earliest efforts. It is only in his last book, the 'Lives of the Poets,' that the mannerism, though equally marked, is so far subdued as to be tolerable. What he himself called his habit of using 'too big words and too many of them' was no affectation, but as much the result of his special idiosyncrasy as his queer gruntings and twitchings. Sir Joshua Reynolds indeed maintained, and we may believe so attentive an observer, that his strange physical contortions were the result of bad habit, not of actual disease Johnson, he said, could sit as still as other people when his attention was called to it. And possibly, if he had tried, he might have avoided the fault of making 'little fishes talk like whales.' But how did the bad habits arise? According to Boswell, Johnson professed to have 'formed his style' partly upon Sir W. Temple, and on 'Chambers's Proposal for his Dictionary.' The statement was obviously misinterpreted: but there is a glimmering of truth in the theory that the 'style was formed'—so far as those words have any meaning—on the 'giants of the seventeenth century,' and especially upon Sir Thomas Browne. Johnson's taste,

[1] See, for example, the great debate on February 13, 1741.

in fact, had led him to the study of writers in many ways congenial to him. His favourite book, as we know, was Burton's 'Anatomy of Melancholy.' The pedantry of the older school did not repel him ; the weighty thought rightly attracted him ; and the more complex structure of sentence was perhaps a pleasant contrast to an ear saturated with the Gallicised neatness of Addison and Pope. Unluckily, the secret of the old majestic cadence was hopelessly lost. Johnson, though spiritually akin to the giants, was the firmest ally and subject of the dwarfish dynasty which supplanted them. The very faculty of hearing seems to change in obedience to some mysterious law at different stages of intellectual development ; and that which to one generation is delicious music is to another a mere droning of bagpipes or the grinding of monotonous barrel-organs.

Assuming that a man can find perfect satisfaction in the versification of the 'Essay on Man,' we can understand his saying of 'Lycidas,' that 'the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing.' In one of the 'Ramblers' we are informed that the accent in blank verse ought properly to rest upon every second syllable throughout the whole line. A little variety must, he admits, be allowed to avoid satiety ; but all lines which do not go in the steady jog-trot of alternate beats as regularly as the piston of a steam engine, are more or less defective. This simple-minded system naturally makes wild work with the poetry of the 'mighty-mouthed inventor of harmonies.' Milton's harsh cadences are indeed excused on the odd ground that he who was 'vindicating the ways of God to man' might have been condemned for 'lavishing much of his attention upon syllables and sounds.' Moreover, the poor man did his best by introducing sounding proper

names, even when they 'added little music to his poem :' an example of this feeble though well-meant expedient being the passage about the moon, which—

> The Tuscan artist views
> At evening, from the top of Fiesole
> Or in Valdarno, to descry new lands, &c.

This profanity passed at the time for orthodoxy. But the misfortune was, that Johnson, unhesitatingly subscribing to the rules of Queen Anne's critics, is always instinctively feeling after the grander effects of the old school. Nature prompts him to the stateliness of Milton, whilst art orders him to deal out long and short syllables alternately, and to make them up in parcels of ten, and then tie the parcels together in pairs by the help of a rhyme. The natural utterance of a man of strong perceptions, but of unwieldy intellect, of a melancholy temperament, and capable of very deep, but not vivacious emotions, would be in stately and elaborate phrases. His style was not more distinctly a work of art than the style of Browne or Milton, but, unluckily, it was a work of bad art. He had the misfortune, not so rare as it may sound, to be born in the wrong century ; and is, therefore, a giant in fetters ; the amplitude of stride is still there, but it is checked into mechanical regularity. A similar phenomenon is observable in other writers of the time. The blank verse of Young, for example, is generally set to Pope's tune with the omission of the rhymes, whilst Thomson, revolting more or less consciously against the canons of his time, too often falls into mere pompous mouthing. Shaftesbury, in the previous generation, trying to write poetical prose, becomes as pedantic as Johnson, though in a different style ; and Gibbon's mannerism is a familiar example of a similar escape from a monotonous simplicity into awkward com-

plexity. Such writers are like men who have been chilled by what Johnson would call the 'frigorifick' influence of the classicism of their fathers, and whose numbed limbs move stiffly and awkwardly in a first attempt to regain the old liberty. The form, too, of the 'Rambler' is unfortunate. Johnson has always Addison before his eyes; to whom it was formerly the fashion to compare him for the same excellent reason which has recently suggested comparisons between Dickens and Thackeray—namely, that their works were published in the same external shape. Unluckily, Johnson gave too much excuse for the comparison by really imitating Addison. He has to make allegories, and to give lively sketches of feminine peculiarities, and to ridicule social foibles of which he was, at most, a distant observer. The inevitable consequence is, that though here and there we catch a glimpse of the genuine man, we are, generally, too much provoked by the awkwardness of his costume to be capable of enjoying, or even reading him.

In many of his writings, however, Johnson manages, almost entirely, to throw off these impediments. In his deep capacity for sympathy and reverence, we recognise some of the elements that go to the making of a poet. He is always a man of intuitions rather than of discursive intellect; often keen of vision, though wanting in analytical power. For poetry, indeed, as it is often understood now, or even as it was understood by Pope, he had little enough qualification. He had not the intellectual vivacity implied in the marvellously neat workmanship of Pope, and still less the delight in all natural and artistic beauty which we generally take to be essential to poetic excellence. His contempt for 'Lycidas' is sufficiently significant upon that head. Still more characteristic is the incapacity to under-

stand Spenser, which comes out incidentally in his remarks upon some of those imitations, which even in the middle of the eighteenth century showed that sensibility to the purest form of poetry was not by any means extinct amongst us. But there is a poetry, though we sometimes seem to forget it, which is the natural expression of deep moral sentiment; and of this Johnson has written enough to reveal very genuine power. The touching verses upon the death of Levett are almost as pathetic as Cowper; and fragments of the two imitations of Juvenal have struck deep enough to be not quite forgotten. We still quote the lines about pointing a moral and adorning a tale, which conclude a really noble passage. We are too often reminded of his melancholy musings over the

> Fears of the brave and follies of the wise,

and a few of the concluding lines of the 'Vanity of Human Wishes,' in which he answers the question whether man must of necessity

> Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate,

in helplessness and ignorance, may have something of a familiar ring. We are to give thanks, he says,

> For love, which scarce collective man can fill;
> For patience, sovereign o'er transmuted ill;
> For faith, that, panting for a happier seat,
> Counts death kind nature's signal for retreat;
> These goods for man, the laws of heaven ordain,
> These goods He grants, who grants the power to gain,
> With these celestial wisdom calms the mind,
> And makes the happiness she does not find.

These lines, and many others which might be quoted, are noble in expression, as well as lofty and tender in feeling. Johnson, like Wordsworth, or even more deeply than Words-

worth, had felt all the 'heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world;' and, though he stumbles a little in the narrow limits of his versification, he bears himself nobly, and manages to put his heart into his poetry. Coleridge's paraphrase of the well-known lines, 'Let observation with extensive observation, observe mankind from China to Peru,' would prevent us from saying that he had thrown off his verbiage. He has not the felicity of Goldsmith's 'Traveller,' though he wrote one of the best couplets in that admirable poem; but his ponderous lines show genuine vigour, and can be excluded from poetry only by the help of an arbitrary classification.

The fullest expression, however, of Johnson's feeling is undoubtedly to be found in 'Rasselas.' The inevitable comparison with Voltaire's 'Candide,' which, by an odd coincidence, appeared almost simultaneously, suggests some curious reflections. The resemblance between the moral of the two books is so strong that, as Johnson remarked, it would have been difficult not to suppose that one had given a hint to the other but for the chronological difficulty. The contrast, indeed, is as marked as the likeness. 'Candide' is not adapted for family reading, whereas 'Rasselas' might be a textbook for young ladies studying English in a convent. 'Candide' is a marvel of clearness and vivacity; whereas to read 'Rasselas' is about as exhilarating as to wade knee-deep through a sandy desert. Voltaire and Johnson, however, the great sceptic and the last of the true old Tories, coincide pretty well in their view of the world, and in the remedy which they suggest. The world is, they agree, full of misery, and the optimism which would deny the reality of the misery is childish. *Il faut cultiver notre jardin* is the last word of 'Candide,' and

Johnson's teaching, both here and elsewhere, may be summed up in the words 'Work, and don't whine.' It need not be considered here, nor, perhaps, is it quite plain, what speculative conclusions Voltaire meant to be drawn from his teaching. The peculiarity of Johnson is, that he is apparently indifferent to any such conclusion. A dogmatic assertion, that the world is on the whole a scene of misery, may be pressed into the service of different philosophies. Johnson asserted the opinion resolutely, both in writing and in conversation, but apparently never troubled himself with any inferences but such as have a directly practical tendency. He was no 'speculatist'—a word which now strikes us as having an American twang, but which was familiar to the lexicographer. His only excursion to the borders of such regions was in the very forcible review of Soame Jenyns, who had made a jaunty attempt to explain the origin of evil by the help of a few of Pope's epigrams. Johnson's sledge-hammer smashes his flimsy platitudes to pieces with an energy too good for such a foe. For speculation, properly so called, there was no need. The review, like 'Rasselas,' is simply a vigorous protest against the popular attempt to make things pleasant by a feeble dilution of the most watery kind of popular teaching. He has no trouble in remarking that the evils of poverty are not alleviated by calling it 'want of riches,' and that there is a poverty which involves want of necessaries. The offered consolation, indeed, came rather awkwardly from the elegant country gentleman to the poor scholar who had just known by experience what it was to live upon fourpence-halfpenny a day. Johnson resolutely looks facts in the face, and calls ugly things by their right names. Men, he tells us over and over again, are wretched, and there is no use in denying it.

This doctrine appears in his familiar talk, and even in the papers which he meant to be light reading. He begins the prologue to a comedy with the words –

> Pressed with the load of life, the weary mind
> Surveys the general toil of human kind.

In the 'Life of Savage' he makes the common remark that the lives of many of the greatest teachers of mankind have been miserable. The explanation to which he inclines is that they have not been more miserable than their neighbours, but that their misery has been more conspicuous. His melancholy view of life may have been caused simply by his unfortunate constitution; for everybody sees in the disease of his own liver a disorder of the universe; but it was also intensified by the natural reaction of a powerful nature against the fluent optimism of the time, which expressed itself in Pope's aphorism, Whatever is, is right. The strongest men of the time revolted against that attempt to cure a deep-seated disease by a few fine speeches. The form taken by Johnson's revolt is characteristic. His nature was too tender and too manly to incline to Swift's misanthropy. Men might be wretched, but he would not therefore revile them as filthy Yahoos. He was too reverent and cared too little for abstract thought to share the scepticism of Voltaire. In this miserable world the one worthy object of ambition is to do one's duty, and the one consolation deserving the name is to be found in religion. That Johnson's religious opinions sometimes took the form of rather grotesque superstition may be true; and it is easy enough to ridicule some of its manifestations. He took the creed of his day without much examination of the evidence upon which its dogmas rested; but a writer must be thoughtless indeed who should be more inclined to laugh at

his superificial oddities, than to admire the reverent spirit and the brave self-respect with which he struggled through a painful life. The protest of 'Rasselas' against optimism is therefore widely different from the protest of Voltaire. The deep and genuine feeling of the Frenchman is concealed under smart assaults upon the dogmas of popular theology; the Englishman desires to impress upon us the futility of all human enjoyments, with a view to deepen the solemnity of our habitual tone of thought. It is true, indeed, that the evil is dwelt upon more forcibly than the remedy. The book is all the more impressive. We are almost appalled by the gloomy strength which sees so forcibly the misery of the world and rejects so unequivocally all the palliatives of sentiment and philosophy. The melancholy is intensified by the ponderous style, which suggests a man weary of a heavy burden. The air seems to be filled with what Johnson once called 'inspissated gloom.' 'Rasselas,' one may say, has a narrow escape of being a great book, though it is ill calculated for the hasty readers of to-day. Indeed, the defects are serious enough. The class of writing to which it belongs demands a certain dramatic picturesqueness to point the moral effectively. Not only the long-winded sentences, but the slow evolution of thought and the deliberation with which he works out his pictures of misery, makes the general effect dull beside such books as 'Candide' or 'Gulliver's Travels.' A touch of epigrammatic exaggeration is very much needed; and yet anybody who has the courage to read it through will admit that Johnson is not an unworthy guide into those gloomy regions of imagination which we all visit sometimes, and which it is as well to visit in good company.

After his fashion, Johnson is a fair representative of

Greatheart. His melancholy is distinguished from that of feebler men by the strength of the conviction that 'it will do no good to whine.' We know his view of the great prophet of the Revolutionary school. 'Rousseau,' he said, to Boswell's astonishment, 'is a very bad man. I would sooner sign a sentence for his transportation than that of any felon who has gone from the Old Bailey these many years. Yes, I should like to have him work in the plantations.' That is a fine specimen of the good Johnsonese prejudices of which we hear so much ; and, of course, it is easy to infer that Johnson was an ignorant bigot, who had not in any degree taken the measure of the great moving forces of his time. Nothing, indeed, can be truer than that Johnson cared very little for the new gospel of the rights of man. His truly British contempt for all such fancies ('for anything I see,' he once said, 'foreigners are fools') is one of his strongest characteristics. Now, Rousseau and his like took a view of the world as it was quite as melancholy as Johnson's. They inferred that it ought to be turned upside down, assured that the millennium would begin as soon as a few revolutionary dogmas were accepted. All their remedies appeared to the excellent Doctor as so much of that cant of which it was a man's first duty to clear his mind. The evils of life were far too deeply seated to be caused or cured by kings or demagogues. One of the most popular commonplaces of the day was the mischief of luxury. That we were all on the high road to ruin on account of our wealth, our corruption, and the growth of the national debt, was the text of any number of political agitators. The whole of this talk was, to his mind, so much whining and cant. Luxury did no harm, and the mass of the people, as indeed was in one sense obvious enough, had

only too little of it. The pet 'state of nature' of theorists was a silly figment. The genuine savage was little better than an animal ; and a savage woman, whose contempt for civilised life had prompted her to escape to the forest, was simply a 'speaking cat.' The natural equality of mankind was mere moonshine. So far is it from being true, he says, that no two people can be together for half an hour without one acquiring an evident superiority over the other. Subordination is an essential element of human happiness. A Whig stinks in his nostrils because to his eye modern Whiggism is 'a negation of all principles.' As he said of Priestley's writings, it unsettles everything and settles nothing. 'He is a cursed Whig, a *bottomless* Whig as they all are now,' was his description apparently of Burke. Order, in fact, is a vital necessity ; what particular form it may take matters comparatively little ; and therefore all revolutionary dogmas were chimerical as an attack upon the inevitable conditions of life, and mischievous so far as productive of useless discontent. We need not ask what mixture of truth and falsehood there may be in these principles. Of course, a Radical, or even a respectable Whig, like Macaulay, who believed in the magical efficacy of the British Constitution, might shriek or laugh at such doctrine. Johnson's political pamphlets, besides the defects natural to a writer who was only a politician by accident, advocate the most retrograde doctrines. Nobody at the present day thinks that the Stamp Act was an admirable or justifiable measure ; or would approve of telling the Americans that they ought to have been grateful for their long exemption instead of indignant at the imposition. 'We do not put a calf into the plough ; we wait till he is an ox'—was not a judicious taunt. He was utterly wrong ; and, if everybody

who is utterly wrong in a political controversy deserves unmixed contempt, there is no more to be said for him. We might indeed argue that Johnson was in some ways entitled to the sympathy of enlightened people. His hatred of the Americans was complicated by his hatred of slave-owners. He anticipated Lincoln in proposing the emancipation of the negroes as a military measure. His uniform hatred for the slave trade scandalised poor Boswell, who held that its abolition would be equivalent to 'shutting the gates of mercy on mankind.' His language about the blundering tyranny of the English rule in Ireland would satisfy Mr. Froude, though he would hardly have loved a Home Ruler. He denounces the frequency of capital punishment and the harshness of imprisonment for debt, and he invokes a compassionate treatment of the outcasts of our streets as warmly as the more sentimental Goldsmith. His conservatism may be at times obtuse, but it is never of the cynical variety. He hates cruelty and injustice as righteously as he hates anarchy. Indeed, Johnson's contempt for mouthing agitators of the Wilkes and Junius variety is one which may be shared by most thinkers who would not accept his principles. There is a vigorous passage in the 'False Alarm' which is scarcely unjust to the patriots of the day. He describes the mode in which petitions are generally got up. They are sent from town to town, and the people flock to see what is to be sent to the King. 'One man signs because he hates the Papists; another because he has vowed destruction to the turnpikes; one because it will vex the parson; another because he owes his landlord nothing; one because he is rich; another because he is poor; one to show that he is not afraid, and another to show that he can write.' The people, he thinks, are as well

off as they are likely to be under any form of government; and grievances about general warrants or the rights of juries in libel cases are not really felt so long as they have enough to eat and drink and wear. The error, we may probably say, was less in the contempt for a very shallow agitation than in the want of perception that deeper causes of discontent were accumulating in the background. Wilkes in himself was a worthless demagogue; but Wilkes was the straw carried by the rising tide of revolutionary sentiment, to which Johnson was entirely blind. Yet whatever we may think of his political philosophy, the value of these solid sturdy prejudices is undeniable. To the fact that Johnson was the typical representative of a large class of Englishmen, we owe it that the Society of Rights did not develop into a Jacobin Club. The fine phrases on which Frenchmen became intoxicated never turned the heads of men impervious to abstract theories and incapable of dropping substances for shadows. There are evils in each temperament; but it is as well that some men should carry into politics that rooted contempt for whining which lay so deep in Johnson's nature. He scorned the sickliness of the Rousseau school as, in spite of his constitutional melancholy, he scorned valetudinarianism whether of the bodily or the spiritual order. He saw evil enough in the world to be heartily, at times too roughly, impatient of all fine ladies who made a luxury of grief or of demagogues who shrieked about theoretical grievances which did not sensibly affect the happiness of one man in a thousand. The lady would not have time to nurse her sorrows if she had been a washerwoman; the grievances with which the demagogues yelled themselves hoarse could hardly be distinguished amidst the sorrows of the vast majority condemned to keep starvation

at bay by unceasing labour. His incapacity for speculation makes his pamphlets worthless beside Burke's philosophical discourses; but the treatment, if wrong and defective on the theoretical side, is never contemptible. Here, as elsewhere, he judges by his intuitive aversions. He rejects too hastily whatever seems insipid or ill-flavoured to his spiritual appetite. Like all the shrewd and sensible part of mankind, he condemns as mere moonshine what may be really the first faint dawn of a new daylight. But then his intuitions are noble, and his fundamental belief is the vital importance of order, of religion, and of morality, coupled with a profound conviction, surely not erroneous, that the chief sources of human suffering lie far deeper than any of the remedies proposed by constitution-mongers and fluent theorists. The literary version of these prejudices or principles is given most explicitly in the 'Lives of the Poets'—the book which is now the most readable of Johnson's performances, and which most frequently recalls his conversational style. Indeed, it is a thoroughly admirable book, and but for one or two defects might enjoy a much more decided popularity. It is full of shrewd sense and righteous as well as keen estimates of men and things. The 'Life of Savage,' written in earlier times, is the best existing portrait of that large class of authors who, in Johnson's phrase, 'hung loose upon society' in the days of the Georges. The Lives of Pope, Dryden, and others have scarcely been superseded, though much fuller information has since come to light; and they are all well worth reading. But the criticism, like the politics, is woefully out of date. Johnson's division between the shams and the realities deserves all respect in both cases, but in both cases he puts many things on the wrong side of the dividing line. His

hearty contempt for sham pastorals and sham love-poetry will be probably shared by modern readers. 'Who will hear of sheep and goats and myrtle bowers and purling rivulets through five acts? Such scenes please barbarians in the dawn of literature, and children in the dawn of life, but will be for the most part thrown away as men grow wise and nations grow learned.' But elsewhere he blunders into terrible misapprehensions. Where he errs by simply repeating the accepted rules of the Pope school, he for once talks mere second-hand nonsense. But his independent judgments are interesting even when erroneous. His unlucky assault upon 'Lycidas,' already noticed, is generally dismissed with a pitying shrug of the shoulders. 'Among the flocks and copses and flowers appear the heathen deities; Jove and Phœbus, Neptune and Æolus, with a long train of mythological imagery, such as a college easily supplies. Nothing can less display knowledge, or less exercise invention, than to tell how a shepherd has lost his companions, and must now feed his flocks alone; how one god asks another god what has become of Lycidas, and how neither god can tell. He who thus grieves can excite no sympathy; he who thus praises will confer no honour.'

Of course every tyro in criticism has his answer ready; he can discourse about the æsthetic tendencies of the *Renaissance* period, and explain the necessity of placing one's self at a writer's point of view, and entering into the spirit of the time. He will add, perhaps, that 'Lycidas' is a test of poetical feeling, and that he who does not appreciate its exquisite melody has no music in his soul. The same writer who will tell us all this, and doubtless with perfect truth, would probably have adopted Pope or Johnson's theory with equal confidence if he had lived in the last

century. 'Lycidas' repelled Johnson by incongruities, which, from his point of view, were certainly offensive. Most modern readers, I will venture to suggest, feel the same annoyances, though they have not the courage to avow them freely. If poetry is to be judged exclusively by the simplicity and force with which it expresses sincere emotion, 'Lycidas' would hardly convince us of Milton's profound sorrow for the death of King, and must be condemned accordingly. To the purely pictorial or musical effects of a poem Johnson was nearly blind ; but that need not suggest a doubt as to the sincerity of his love for the poetry which came within the range of his own sympathies. Every critic is in effect criticising himself as well as his author ; and I confess that to my mind an obviously sincere record of impressions, however one-sided they may be, is infinitely refreshing, as revealing at least the honesty of the writer. The ordinary run of criticism generally implies nothing but the extreme desire of the author to show that he is open to the very last new literary fashion. I should welcome a good assault upon Shakespeare which was not prompted by a love of singularity ; and there are half-a-dozen popular idols—I have not the courage to name them—a genuine attack upon whom I could witness with entire equanimity, not to say some complacency. If Johnson's blunder in this case implied sheer stupidity, one can only say that honest stupidity is a much better thing than clever insincerity or fluent repetition of second-hand dogmas. But, in fact, this dislike of 'Lycidas,' and a good many instances of critical incapacity might be added, is merely a misapplication of a very sound principle. The hatred of cant and humbug and affectation of all vanity is a most salutary ingredient even in poetical criticism. Johnson, with his natural ignorance of

that historical method, the exaltation of which threatens to become a part of our contemporary cant, made the pardonable blunder of supposing that what would have been gross affectation in Gray must have been affectation in Milton. His ear had been too much corrupted by the contemporary school to enable him to recognise beauties which would even have shone through some conscious affectation. He had the rare courage—for, even then, Milton was one of the tabooed poets—to say what he thought as forcibly as he could say it; and he has suffered the natural punishment of plain speaking. It must, of course, be admitted that a book embodying such principles is doomed to become more or less obsolete, like his political pamphlets. And yet, as significant of the writer's own character, as containing many passages of sound judgment, expressed in forcible language, it is still, if not a great book, really impressive within the limits of its capacity.

After this imperfect survey of Johnson's writings, it only remains to be noticed that all the most prominent peculiarities are the very same which give interest to his spoken utterances. The doctrine is the same, though the preacher's manner has changed. His melancholy is not so heavy-eyed and depressing in his talk, for we catch him at moments of excitement; but it is there, and sometimes breaks out emphatically and unexpectedly. The prospect of death often clouds his mind, and he bursts into tears when he thinks of his past sufferings. His hearty love of truth, and uncompromising hatred of cant in all its innumerable transmutations, prompt half his most characteristic sayings. His queer prejudices take a humorous form, and give a delightful zest to his conversation. His contempt for abstract speculation comes out when he vanquishes Berkeley,

not with a grin, but by 'striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone.' His arguments, indeed, never seem to have owed much to such logic as implies systematic and continuous thought. He scarcely waits till his pistol misses fire to knock you down with the butt-end. The merit of his best sayings is not that they compress an argument into a phrase, but that they are vivid expressions of an intuitive judgment. In other words, they are always humorous rather than witty. He holds his own belief with so vigorous a grasp that all argumentative devices for loosening it seem to be thrown away. As Boswell says, he is through your body in an instant without any preliminary parade ; he gives a deadly lunge, but cares little for skill of fence. 'We know we are free and there's an end of it,' is his characteristic summary of a perplexed bit of metaphysics ; and he would evidently have no patience to wander through the labyrinths in which men like Jonathan Edwards delighted to perplex themselves. We should have been glad to see a fuller report of one of those conversations in which Burke 'wound into a subject like a serpent,' and contrast his method with Johnson's downright hitting. Boswell had not the power, even if he had the will, to give an adequate account of such a 'wit combat.'

That such a mind should express itself most forcibly in speech is intelligible enough. Conversation was to him not merely a contest, but a means of escape from himself. 'I may be cracking my joke,' he said to Boswell, 'and cursing the sun : Sun, how I hate thy beams ?' The phrase sounds exaggerated, but it was apparently his settled conviction that the only remedy for melancholy, except indeed the religious remedy, was in hard work or in the rapture of conversational strife. His little circle of friends called forth

his humour as the House of Commons excited Chatham's eloquence ; and both of them were inclined to mouth too much when deprived of the necessary stimulus. Chatham's set speeches were as pompous as Johnson's deliberate writing. Johnson and Chatham resemble the chemical bodies which acquire entirely new properties when raised beyond a certain degree of temperature. Indeed, we frequently meet touches of the conversational Johnson in his controversial writing. 'Taxation no Tyranny' is at moments almost as pithy as Swift, though the style is never so simple. The celebrated Letter to Chesterfield, and the letter in which he tells MacPherson that he will not be 'deterred from detecting what he thinks a cheat by the menaces of a ruffian,' are as good specimens of the smashing repartee as anything in Boswell's reports. Nor, indeed, does his pomposity sink to mere verbiage so often as might be supposed. It is by no means easy to translate his ponderous phrases into simple words without losing some of their meaning. The structure of the sentences is compact, though they are too elaborately balanced and stuffed with superfluous antitheses. The language might be simpler, but it is not a mere sham aggregation of words. His written style, however faulty in other respects, is neither slipshod nor ambiguous, and passes into his conversational style by imperceptible degrees. The radical identity is intelligible, though the superficial contrast is certainly curious. We may perhaps say that his century, unfavourable to him as a writer, gave just what he required for talking. If, as is sometimes said, the art of conversation is disappearing, it is because society has become too large and diffuse. The good talker, as indeed the good artist of every kind, depends upon the tacit co-operation of the social medium. The chorus, as Johnson has himself

shown very well in one of the 'Ramblers,' is quite as essential as the main performer. Nobody talks well in London, because everybody has constantly to meet a fresh set of interlocutors, and is as much put out as a musician who has to be always learning a new instrument. A literary dictator has ceased to be a possibility, so far as direct personal influence is concerned. In the club, Johnson knew how every blow would tell, and in the rapid thrust and parry dropped the heavy style which muffled his utterances in print. He had to deal with concrete illustrations, instead of expanding into platitudinous generalities. The obsolete theories which impair the value of his criticism and his politics, become amusing in the form of pithy sayings, though they weary us when asserted in formal expositions. His greatest literary effort, the 'Dictionary,' has of necessity become antiquated in use, and, in spite of the intellectual vigour indicated, can hardly be commended for popular reading. And thus but for the inimitable Boswell, it must be admitted that Johnson would probably have sunk very deeply into oblivion. A few good sayings would have been preserved by Mrs. Thrale and others, or have been handed down by tradition, and doubtless assigned in process of time to Sydney Smith and other conversational celebrities. A few couplets from the 'Vanity of Human Wishes' would not yet have been submerged, and curious readers would have recognised the power of 'Rasselas,' and been delighted with some shrewd touches in the 'Lives of the Poets.' But with all desire to magnify critical insight, it must be admitted that that man would have shown singular penetration, and been regarded as an eccentric commentator, who had divined the humour and the fervour of mind which lay hid in the remains of the

huge lexicographer. And yet when we have once recognised his power, we can see it everywhere indicated in his writings, though by an unfortunate fatality the style or the substance was always so deeply affected by the faults of the time, that the product is never thoroughly sound. His tenacious conservatism caused him to cling to decaying materials for the want of anything better, and he has suffered the natural penalty. He was a great force half wasted, so far as literature was concerned, because the fashionable costume of the day hampered the free exercises of his powers, and because the only creeds to which he could attach himself were in the phase of decline and inanition. A century earlier or later he might have succeeded in expressing himself through books as well as through his talk ; but it is not given to us to choose the time of our birth, and some very awkward consequences follow.

CRABBE

It is nearly a century since George Crabbe, then a young man of five-and-twenty, put three pounds in his pocket and started from his native town of Aldborough, with a box of clothes and a case of surgical instruments, to make his fortune in London. Few men have attempted that adventure with less promising prospects. Any sensible adviser would have told him to prefer starvation in his native village to starvation in the back lanes of London. The adviser would, perhaps, have been vexed, but would not have been confuted, by Crabbe's good fortune. We should still recommend a youth not to jump into a river, though, of a thousand who try the experiment, one may happen to be rescued by a benevolent millionaire, and be put in the road to fortune. The chances against Crabbe were enormous. Literature, considered as a trade, is a good deal better at the present day than it was towards the end of the last century, and yet anyone who has an opportunity of comparing the failures with the successes would be more apt to quote Chatterton than Crabbe as a precedent for youthful aspirants. Crabbe, indeed, might say for himself that literature was the only path open to him. His father was collector of salt duties at Aldborough, a position, as one may imagine, of no very great emolument. He had, however, given his son the chance of acquiring a smattering of 'scholarship,' in the

sense in which that word is used by the less educated lower classes. To the slender store of learning acquired in a cheap country school, the lad managed to add such medical training as could be picked up during an apprenticeship in an apothecary's shop. With this provision of knowledge he tried to obtain practice in his native town. He failed to get any patients of the paying variety. Crabbe was clumsy and absent-minded to the end of his life. He had, moreover, a taste for botany, and the shrewd inhabitants of Aldborough, with that perverse tendency to draw inferences which is characteristic of people who cannot reason, argued that, as he picked up his samples in the ditches, he ought to sell the medicines presumably compounded from them for nothing. In one way or other, poor Crabbe had sunk to the verge of distress. Of course, under these circumstances, he had fallen in love and engaged himself at the age of eighteen to a young lady, apparently as poor as himself. Of course, too, he called Miss Elmy 'Mira,' and addressed her in verses which occasionally appeared in the poet's corner of a certain 'Wheble's Magazine.' My Mira, said the young surgeon, in a style which must have been rather antiquated even in Aldborough—

> My Mira, shepherds, is as fair
> As sylvan nymphs who haunt the vale;
> As sylphs who dwell in purest air,
> As fays who skim the dusky dale.

Moreover, he won a prize for a poem on Hope, and composed an 'Allegorical Fable' and a piece called 'The Atheist reclaimed;' and, in short, added plentifully to the vast rubbish-heap of old-world verses, now decayed beyond the industry of the most persevering of Dryasdusts. Nay,

he even succeeded by some mysterious means in getting one of his poems published separately. It was called 'Inebriety,' and was an unblushing imitation of Pope. Here is a couplet by way of sample :—

> Champagne the courtier drinks the spleen to chase,
> The colonel Burgundy, and Port his Grace.

From the satirical the poet diverges into the mock heroic :—

> See Inebriety ! her wand she waves,
> And lo ! her pale, and lo ! her purple slaves.

The interstices of the box of clothing which went with him from Aldborough to London were doubtless crammed with much waste paper scribbled over with these feeble echoes of Pope's Satires, and with appeals to nymphs, muses, and shepherds. Crabbe was one of those men who are born a generation after their natural epoch, and was as little accessible to the change of fashion in poetry as in costume. When, therefore, he finally resolved to hazard his own fate and Mira's upon the result of his London adventure, the literary goods at his disposal were already somewhat musty in character. The year 1780, in which he reached London, marks the very nadir of English poetry. From the days of Elizabeth to our own there has never been so absolutely barren a period. People had become fairly tired of the jingle of Pope's imitators, and the new era had not dawned. Goldsmith and Gray, both recently dead, serve to illustrate the condition in which the most exquisite polish and refinement of language has been developed until there is a danger of sterility. The 'Elegy' and the 'Deserted Village' are in their way inimitable poems : but we feel that the intellectual fibre of the poets has become dangerously delicate.

The critical faculty could not be stimulated further without destroying all spontaneous impulse. The reaction to a more masculine and passionate school was imminent; and if the excellent Crabbe could have put into his box a few of Burns's lyrics, or even a copy of Cowper's 'Task,' one might have augured better for his prospects. But what chance was there for a man who could still be contentedly invoking the muse and stringing together mechanic echoes of Pope's couplets? How could he expect to charm the jaded faculties of a generation which was already beginning to heave and stir with a longing for some fresh excitement? For a year the fate which has overtaken so many rash literary adventurers seemed to be approaching steadily. One temporary gleam of good fortune cheered him for a time. He persuaded an enterprising publisher to bring out a poem called 'The Candidate,' which had some faint success, though ridiculed by the reviewers. Unluckily the publisher became bankrupt and Crabbe was thrown upon his resources—the poor three pounds and box of surgical instruments aforesaid. How he managed to hold out for a year is a mystery. It was lucky for him, as he intimates, that he had never heard of the fate of Chatterton, who had poisoned himself just ten years before. A Journal which he wrote for Mira is published in his Life, and gives an account of his feelings during three months of his cruel probation. He applies for a situation as amanuensis offered in an advertisement, and comforts himself on failing with the reflection that the advertiser was probably a sharper. He writes piteous letters to publishers, and gets, of course, the stereotyped reply with which the most amiable of publishers must damp the ardour of aspiring genius. The disappointment is not much softened

by the publisher's statement that 'he does not mean by this to insinuate any want of merit in the poem, but rather a want of attention in the public.' Bit by bit his surgical instruments go to the pawnbroker. When one publisher sends his polite refusal poor Crabbe has only sixpence-farthing in the world, which, by the purchase of a pint of porter, is reduced to fourpence-halfpenny. The exchequer fills again by the disappearance of his wardrobe and his watch ; but ebbs under a new temptation. He buys some odd volumes of Dryden for three-and-sixpence, and on coming home tears his only coat, which he manages to patch tolerably with a borrowed needle and thread, pretending, with a pathetic shift, that they are required to stitch together manuscripts instead of broadcloth. And so for a year the wolf creeps nearer the door, whilst Crabbe gallantly keeps up appearances and spirits, and yet he tries to preserve a show of good spirits in the Journal to Mira, and continues to labour at his versemaking. Perhaps, indeed, it may be regarded as a bad symptom that he is reduced to distracting his mind by making an analysis of a dull sermon. 'There is nothing particular in it,' he admits, but at least it is better, he thinks, to listen to a bad sermon than to the blasphemous rant of deistical societies. Indeed, Crabbe's spirit was totally unlike the desperate pride of Chatterton. He was of the patient enduring tribe, and comforts himself by religious meditations, which are, perhaps, rather commonplace in expression, but when read by the light of the distresses he was enduring, show a brave unembittered spirit, not to be easily respected too highly. Starvation seemed to be approaching ; or, at least, the only alternative was the abandonment of his ambition, and acceptance, if he could get it, of the post of druggist's

assistant. He had but one resource left; and that not of the most promising kind. Crabbe, amongst his other old-fashioned notions, had a strong belief in the traditional patron. Johnson might have given him some hints upon the subject; but luckily, as it turned out, he pursued what Chesterfield's correspondent would have thought the most hopeless of all courses. He wrote to Lord North, who was at that moment occupied in contemplating the final results of the ingenious policy by which America was lost to England, and probably consigned Crabbe's letter to the waste-paper basket. Then he tried the effect of a copy of verses, beginning:—

> Ah! Shelburne, blest with all that's good or great,
> T' adorn a rich or save a sinking State.

He added a letter saying that, as Lord North had not answered him, Lord Shelburne would probably be glad to supply the needs of a starving apothecary turned poet. Another copy of verses was enclosed, pointing out that Shelburne's reputed liberality would be repaid in the usual coin:

> Then shall my grateful strains his ear rejoice,
> His name harmonious thrilled on Mira's voice;
> Round the reviving bays new sweets shall spring,
> And Shelburne's fame through laughing valleys ring!

Nobody can blame North and Shelburne for not acting the part of Good Samaritans. He, at least, may throw the first stone who has always taken the trouble to sift the grain from the chaff amidst all the begging letters which he has received, and who has never lamented that his benevolence outran his discretion. But there was one man in England at the time who had the rare union of qualities necessary for Crabbe's purpose. Burke is a name never to be mentioned without reverence; not only because Burke was

incomparably the greatest of all English political writers, and a standing refutation of the theory which couples rhetorical excellence with intellectual emptiness, but also because he was a man whose glowing hatred of all injustice and sympathy for all suffering never evaporated in empty words. His fine literary perception enabled him to detect the genuine excellence which underlay the superficial triviality of Crabbe's verses. He discovered the genius where men like North and Shelburne might excusably see nothing but the mendicant versifier; and a benevolence still rarer than his critical ability forbade him to satisfy his conscience by the sacrifice of a five-pound note. When, by the one happy thought of his life, Crabbe appealed to Burke's sympathy, the poet was desperately endeavouring to get a poem through the press. But he owed fourteen pounds, and every application to friends as poor as himself, and to patrons upon whom he had no claims, had been unsuccessful. Nothing but ruin was before him. After writing to Burke he spent the night in pacing Westminster Bridge. The letter on which his fate hung is the more pathetic because it is free from those questionable poetical flourishes which had failed to conciliate his former patrons. It tells his story frankly and forcibly. Burke, however, was not a rich man, and was at one of the most exciting periods of his politica career. His party was at last fighting its way to power by means of the general resentment against the gross mismanagement of their antagonists. A perfunctory discharge of the duty of charity would have been pardonable; but from the moment when Crabbe addressed Burke the poor man's fortune was made. Burke's glory rests upon services of much more importance to the world at large than even the preservation to the country of a man of genuine power.

Yet there are few actions on which he could reflect with more unalloyed satisfaction ; and the case is not a solitary one in Burke's history. A political triumph may often be only hastened a year or two by the efforts of even a great leader ; but the salvage of a genius which would otherwise have been hopelessly wrecked in the deep waters of poverty is so much clear gain to mankind. One circumstance may be added as oddly characteristic of Crabbe. He always spoke of his benefactor with becoming gratitude : and many years afterwards Moore and Rogers thought that they might extract some interesting anecdotes of the great author from the now celebrated poet. Burke, as we know, was a man whom you would discover to be remarkable if you stood with him for five minutes under a haystack in a shower. Crabbe stayed in his house for months under circumstances most calculated to be impressive. Burke was at the height of his power and reputation ; he was the first man of any distinction whom the poet had ever seen ; the two men had long and intimate conversations, and Crabbe, it may be added, was a very keen observer of character. And yet all that Rogers and Moore could extract from him was a few 'vague generalities.' Moore suggests some explanation ; but the fact seems to be that Crabbe was one of those simple, homespun characters, whose interests are strictly limited to their own peculiar sphere. Burke, when he pleased, could talk of oxen as well as politics, and doubtless adapted his conversation to the taste of the young poet. Probably, much more was said about the state of Burke's farm than about the prospects of the Whig party. Crabbe's powers of vision were as limited as they were keen, and the great qualities to which Burke owed his reputation could only exhibit themselves in a sphere to which Crabbe never rose.

His attempt to draw a likeness of Burke under the name of 'Eugenius,' in the 'Borough,' is open to the objection that it would be nearly as applicable to Wilberforce, Howard, or Dr. Johnson. It is a mere complimentary daub in which every remarkable feature of the original is blurred or altogether omitted.

The inward Crabbe remained to the end of his days what nature and education had already made him; the outward Crabbe, by the help of Burke, rapidly put on a more prosperous appearance. His poems were published and achieved success. He took orders and found patrons. Thurlow gave him £100, and afterwards presented him to two small livings, growling out with an oath that he was 'as like Parson Adams as twelve to a dozen.' The Duke of Rutland appointed him chaplain, a position in which he seems to have been singularly out of his element. Further patronage, however, made him independent, and he married his Mira and lived very happily ever afterwards. Perhaps, with his old-fashioned ideas, he would not quite have satisfied some clerical critics of the present day. His views about non-residence and pluralities seem to have been lax for the time; and his hearty dislike for dissent was coupled with a general dislike for enthusiasm of all kinds. He liked to ramble about after flowers and fossils, and to hammer away at his poems in a study where chaos reigned supreme. For twenty-two years after his first success as an author, he never managed to get a poem into a state fit for publication, though periodical conflagrations of masses of manuscript—too vast to be burnt in the chimney—testified to his continuous industry. His reappearance seems to have been caused chiefly by his desire to send a son to the University. His success was repeated, though a new school had arisen

which knew not Pope. The youth who had been kindly received by Burke, Reynolds, and Johnson, came back from his country retreat to be lionised at Holland House, and be petted by Brougham and Moore, and Rogers, and Campbell, and all the rising luminaries. He paid a visit to Scott contemporaneously with George IV., and pottered about the queer old wynds and closes of Edinburgh, which he preferred to the New Town, and apparently to Arthur's Seat, with a judicious *caddie* following to keep him out of mischief. A more tangible kind of homage was the receipt of £3,000 from Murray for his 'Tales of the Hall,' which so delighted him that he insisted on carrying the bills loose in his pocket till he could show them 'to his son John' in the country.[1] There, no doubt, he was most at home; and his parishioners gradually became attached to their 'Parson Adams,' in spite of his quaintnesses and some manful defiance of their prejudices. All women and children loved him, and he died at a good old age in 1832, having lived into a new order in many things, and been as little affected by the change as most men. The words with which he concludes the sketch of the Vicar in his 'Borough' are not inappropriate to himself:—

> Nor one so old has left this world of sin
> More like the being that he entered in.

The peculiar homeliness of Crabbe's character and poetry is excellently hit off in the 'Rejected Addresses,' and the lines beginning

> John Richard William Alexander Dwyer
> Was footman to Justinian Stubbs, Esquire,

[1] It seems, one is sorry to add, that Murray made a very bad bargain in this case.

are probably more familiar to the present generation than any of the originals. 'Pope in the worsted stockings' is the title hit off for him by Horace Smith, and has about the same degree of truth as most smart sayings of the kind. The 'worsted stockings' at least are characteristic. Crabbe's son and biographer indicates some of the surroundings of his father's early life in a description of the uncle, a Mr. Tovell, with whom the poet's wife, the Mira of his Journal, passed her youth. He was a sturdy yeoman, living in an old house with a moat, a rookery, and fishponds. The hall was paved with black and white marble, and the staircase was of black oak, slippery as ice, with a chiming clock and a barrel-organ on the landing-places. The handsome drawing-room and dining-rooms were only used on grand occasions, such as the visit of a neighbouring peer. Mrs. Tovell jealously reserved for herself the duty of scrubbing these state apartments, and sent any servant to the right-about who dared to lay unhallowed hands upon them. The family sat habitually in the old-fashioned kitchen, by a hugh open chimney, where the blaze of a whole pollard sometimes eclipsed the feeble glimmer of the single candle in an iron candlestick, intended to illuminate Mrs. Tovell's labours with the needle. Masters and servants, with any travelling tinker or ratcatcher, all dined together, and the nature of their meals has been described by Crabbe himself:—

> But when the men beside their station took,
> The maidens with them, and with these the cook;
> When one huge wooden bowl before them stood,
> Filled with huge balls of farinaceous food;
> With bacon, mass saline, where never lean
> Beneath the brown and bristly rind was seen;
> When from a single horn the party drew
> Their copious draughts of heavy ale and new;

then, the poet goes on to intimate, squeamish persons might feel a little uncomfortable. After dinner followed a nap of precisely one hour. Then bottles appeared on the table, and neighbouring farmers, with faces rosy with brandy, drifted in for a chat. One of these heroes never went to bed sober, but scandalised all teetotallers by retaining all his powers and coursing after he was ninety. Bowl after bowl of punch was emptied, and the conversation took so convivial a character that Crabbe generally found it expedient to withdraw, though his son, who records these performances, was held to be too young to be injured, and the servants were too familiar for their presence to be a restraint.

It was in this household that the poet found his Mira. Crabbe's own father was apparently at a lower point of the social scale; and during his later years took to drinking and to flinging dishes about the room whenever he was out of temper. Crabbe always drew from the life; most of his characters might have joined in his father's drinking bouts, or told stories over Mr. Tovell's punchbowls. Doubtless a social order of the same kind survived till a later period in various corners of the island. The Tovells of to-day get their fashions from London, and their labourers, instead of dining with them in their kitchen, have taken to forming unions and making speeches about their rights. If, here and there, in some remote nooks we find an approximation to the coarse, hearty, patriarchal mode of life, we regard it as a naturalist regards a puny modern reptile, the representative of gigantic lizards of old geological epochs. A sketch or two of its peculiarities, sufficiently softened and idealised to suit modern tastes, forms a picturesque background to a modern picture. Some of Miss Brontë's rough Yorkshire-

men would have drunk punch with Mr. Tovell ; and the farmers in the 'Mill on the Floss' are representatives of the same race, slightly degenerate, in so far as they are just conscious that a new cause of disturbance is setting into the quiet rural districts. Dandie Dinmont again is a relation of Crabbe's heroes, though the fresh air of the Cheviots and the stirring traditions of the old border life have conferred upon him a more poetical colouring. To get a realistic picture of country life as Crabbe saw it, we must go back to Squire Western, or to some of the roughly-hewn masses of flesh who sat to Hogarth. Perhaps it may be said that Miss Austen's delicate portrait of the more polished society, which took the waters at Bath, and occasionally paid a visit to London, implies a background of coarser manners and more brutal passions, which lay outside her peculiar province. The question naturally occurs to social philosophers, whether the improvement in the external decencies of life and the wider intellectual horizon of modern days prove a genuine advance over the rude and homely plenty of an earlier generation. I refer to such problems only to remark that Crabbe must be consulted by those who wish to look upon the seamy side of the time which he describes. He very soon dropped his nymphs and shepherds, and ceased to invoke the idyllic muse. In his long portrait gallery there are plenty of virtuous people, and some people intended to be refined ; but features indicative of coarse animal passions, brutality, selfishness, and sensuality are drawn to the life, and the development of his stories is generally determined by some of the baser elements of human nature. 'Jesse and Colin' are described in one of the Tales ; but they are not the Jesse and Colin of Dresden china. They are such rustics as ate fat bacon and drank 'heavy ale and new ;'

not the imaginary personages who exchanged amatory civilities in the old-fashioned pastorals ridiculed by Pope and Gay.

Crabbe's rough style is indicative of his general temper. It is in places at least the most slovenly and slipshod that was ever adopted by any true poet. The authors of the 'Rejected Addresses' had simply to copy, without attempting the impossible task of caricaturing. One of their familiar couplets, for example, runs thus :—

> Emmanuel Jennings brought his youngest boy
> Up as a corn-cutter, a safe employ !

And here is the original Crabbe :—

> Swallow, a poor attorney, brought his boy
> Up at his desk, and gave him his employ.

When boy cannot be made to rhyme with employ, Crabbe is very fond of dragging in a hoy. In the 'Parish Register' he introduces a narrative about a village grocer and his friend in these lines :—

> Aged were both, that Dawkins, Ditchem this,
> Who much of marriage thought and much amiss.

Or to quote one more opening of a story :—

> Counter and Clubb were men in trade, whose pains,
> Credit, and prudence, brought them constant gains ;
> Partners and punctual, every friend agreed
> Counter and Clubb were men who must succeed.

But of such gems anyone may gather as many as he pleases by simply turning over Crabbe's pages. In one sense, they are rather pleasant than otherwise. They are so characteristic and put forward with such absolute simplicity that they have the same effect as a good old provincialism in the mouth of a genuine countryman. It must, however,

be admitted that Crabbe's careful study of Pope had not initiated him in some of his master's secrets. The worsted stockings were uncommonly thick. If Pope's brilliance of style savours too much of affectation, Crabbe never manages to hit off an epigram in the whole of his poetry. The language seldom soars above the style which would be intelligible to the merest clodhopper ; and we can understand how, when in his later years Crabbe was introduced to wits and men of the world, he generally held his peace, or, at most, let fall some bit of dry quiet humour. At rare intervals he remembers that a poet ought to indulge in a figure of speech, and laboriously compounds a simile which appears in his poetry like a bit of gold lace on a farmer's homespun coat. He confessed as much in answer to a shrewd criticism of Jeffrey's, saying that he generally thought of such illustrations and inserted them after he had finished his tale. Here is one of these deliberately-concocted ornaments intended to explain the remark that the difference between the character of two brothers came out when they were living together quietly :—

> As various colours in a painted ball,
> While it has rest are seen distinctly all ;
> Till, whirl'd around by some exterior force,
> They all are blended in the rapid course ;
> So in repose and not by passion swayed
> We saw the difference by their habits made ;
> But, tried by strong emotions, they became
> Filled with one love, and were in heart the same.

The conceit is ingenious enough in one sense, but painfully ingenious. It requires some thought to catch the likeness suggested, and then it turns out to be purely superficial. The resemblance of such a writer to Pope obviously does not go deep. Crabbe imitates Pope because everybody

imitated him at that day. He adopted Pope's metre because it had come to be almost the only recognised means of poetical expression. He stuck to it after his contemporaries had introduced new versification, partly because he was old-fashioned to the backbone, and partly because he had none of those lofty inspirations which naturally generate new forms of melody. He seldom trusts himself to be lyrical, and when he does his versification is nearly as monotonous as it is in his narrative poetry. We must not expect to soar with Crabbe into any of the loftier regions; to see the world 'apparelled in celestial light,' or to descry

> Such forms as glitter in the muses' ray,
> With orient hues, unborrowed of the sun.

We shall find no vehement outbursts of passion, breaking loose from the fetters of sacred convention. Crabbe is perfectly content with the British Constitution, with the Thirty-nine Articles, and all respectabilities in Church and State, and therefore he is quite content also with the good old jogtrot of the recognised metres; his language, halting invariably, and for the most part clumsy enough, is sufficiently differentiated from prose by the mould into which it is run, and he never wants to kick over the traces with his more excitable contemporaries.

> The good old rule
> Sufficeth him, the simple plan

that each verse should consist of ten syllables, with an occasional Alexandrine to accommodate a refractory epithet, and should rhyme peaceably with its neighbour.

From all which it may be too harshly inferred that Crabbe is merely a writer in rhyming prose, and deserving of no attention from the more enlightened adherents of a

later school. The inference, I say, would be hasty, for it is impossible to read Crabbe patiently without receiving a very distinct and original impression. If some pedants of æsthetic philosophy should declare that we ought not to be impressed because Crabbe breaks all their rules, we can only reply they are mistaking their trade. The true business of the critic is to discover from observation what are the conditions under which a book appeals to our sympathies, and, if he finds an apparent exception to his rules, to admit that he has made an oversight, and not to condemn the facts which persist in contradicting his theories. It may, indeed, be freely granted that Crabbe has suffered seriously by his slovenly methods and his insensibility to the more exquisite and ethereal forms of poetical excellence. But however he may be classified, he possesses the essential mark of genius, namely, that his pictures, however coarse the workmanship, stamp themselves on our minds indelibly and instantaneously. His pathos is here and there clumsy, but it goes straight to the mark. His characteristic qualities were first distinctly shown in the 'Village,' which was partly composed under Burke's eye, and was more or less touched by Johnson. It was, indeed, a work after Johnson's own heart, intended to be a pendant, or perhaps a corrective, to Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village.' It is meant to give the bare blank facts of rural life, stripped of all sentimental gloss. To read the two is something like hearing a speech from an optimist landlord and then listening to the comments of Mr. Arch. Goldsmith, indeed, was far too exquisite an artist to indulge in mere conventionalities about agricultural bliss. If his 'Auburn' is rather idealised, the most prosaic of critics cannot object to the glow thrown by the memory of the poet over the scene of now ruined happiness, and, moreover,

Goldsmith's delicate humour guards him instinctively from laying on his rose-colour too thickly. Crabbe, however, will have nothing to do with rose-colour, thick or thin. There is one explicit reference in the poem to his predecessor's work, and it is significant. Everybody remembers, or ought to remember, Goldsmith's charming pastor, to whom it can only be objected that he has not the fear of political economists before his eyes. This is Crabbe's retort after describing a dying pauper in need of spiritual consolation :

> And does not he, the pious man, appear,
> He, 'passing rich with forty pounds a year?'
> Ah! no; a shepherd of a different stock,
> And far unlike him, feeds this little flock :
> A jovial youth, who thinks his Sunday's task
> As much as God or man can fairly ask ;
> The rest he gives to loves and labours light,
> To fields the morning, and to feasts the night.
> None better skilled the noisy pack to guide,
> To urge their chase, to cheer them, or to chide ;
> A sportsman keen, he shoots through half the day,
> And, skilled at whist, devotes the night to play.

This fox-hunting parson (of whom Cowper has described a duplicate) lets the pauper die as he pleases ; and afterwards allows him to be buried without attending, performing the funerals, it seems, in a lump upon Sundays. Crabbe admits in a note that such negligence was uncommon, but adds that it is not unknown. The flock is, on the whole, worthy of the shepherd. The old village sports have died out in favour of smuggling and wrecking. The poor are not, as rich men fancy, healthy and well fed. Their work makes them premature victims to ague and rheumatism ; their food is

> Homely, not wholesome, plain, not plenteous, such
> As you who praise would never deign to touch.

The ultimate fate of the worn-out labourer is the poorhouse, described in lines of which it is enough to say that Scott and Wordsworth learnt them by heart, and the melancholy death-bed already noticed. Are we reading a poem or a Blue Book done into rhyme? may possibly be the question of some readers. The answer should perhaps be that a good many Blue Books contain an essence which only requires to be properly extracted and refined to become genuine poetry. If Crabbe's verses retain rather too much of the earthly elements, he is capable of transmuting his minerals into genuine gold, as well as of simply collecting them. Nothing, for example, is more characteristic than the mode in which the occasional descriptions of nature are harmoniously blended with the human life in his poetry. Crabbe is an ardent lover of a certain type of scenery, to which justice has not often been done. We are told how, after a long absence from Suffolk, he rode sixty miles from his house to have a dip in the sea. Some of his poems appear to be positively impregnated with a briny, or rather perhaps a tarry, odour. The sea which he loved was by no means a Byronic sea. It has no grandeur of storm, and still less has it the Mediterranean blue. It is the sluggish muddy element which washes the flat shores of his beloved Suffolk. He likes even the shelving beach, with fishermen's boats and decaying nets and remnants of stale fish. He loves the dreary estuary, where the slow tide sways backwards and forwards, and whence

> High o'er the restless deep, above the reach
> Of gunner's hope, vast flocks of wildfowl stretch.

The coming generation of poets took to the mountains; but Crabbe remained faithful to the dismal and yet, in his hands, the impressive scenery of his native salt-marshes.

His method of description suits the country. His verses never become melodramatic, nor does he ever seem to invest nature with the mystic life of Wordsworth's poetry. He gives the plain prosaic facts which impress us because they are in such perfect harmony with the sentiment. Here, for example, is a fragment from the 'Village,' which is simply a description of the neighbourhood of Aldborough :—

> Lo ! where the heath, with withering brake grown o'er,
> Lends the light turf that warms the neighbouring poor ;
> From thence a length of burning sand appears,
> Where the thin harvest waves its withered ears ;
> Rank weeds, that every art and care defy,
> Reign o'er the land, and rob the blighted rye ;
> There thistles stretch their prickly arms afar,
> And to the ragged infant threaten war ;
> There poppies nodding, mock the hope of toil ;
> There the blue bugloss paints the sterile soil ;
> Hardy and high, above the slender sheaf,
> The slimy mallow waves her silky leaf ;
> O'er the young shoot the charlock throws a shade,
> And clasping tares cling round the sickly blade.

The writer is too obviously a botanist ; but the picture always remains with us as the only conceivable background for the poverty-stricken population whom he is about to describe. The actors in the 'Borough' are presented to us in a similar setting ; and it may be well to put a sea-piece beside this bit of barren common. Crabbe's range of descriptive power is pretty well confined within the limits so defined. He is scarcely at home beyond the tide marks :—

> Be it the summer noon ; a sandy space
> The ebbing tide has left upon its place ;
> Then just the hot and stony beach above,
> Light twinkling streams in bright confusion move ;
> . . . . . .

There the broad bosom of the ocean keeps
An equal motion ; swelling as it sleeps,
Then slowly sinking ; curling to the strand,
Faint lazy waves o'ercreep the ridgy sand,
Or tap the tarry boat with gentle blow,
And back return in silence, smooth and slow.
Ships in the calm seem anchored : for they glide
On the still sea, urged slowly by the tide :
Art thou not present, this calm scene before
Where all beside is pebbly length of shore,
And far as eye can reach, it can discern no more ?

I have omitted a couplet which verges on the scientific ; for Crabbe is unpleasantly anxious to leave nothing unexplained. The effect is, in its way, perfect. Anyone who pleases may compare it with Wordsworth's calm in the verses upon Peel Castle, where the sentiment is given without the minute statement of facts, and where, too, we have the inevitable quotation about the 'light that never was on sea or land,' and is pretty nearly as rare in Crabbe's poetry. What he sees we can all see, though not so intensely, and his art consists in selecting the precise elements that tell most forcibly towards bringing us into the required frame of mind. To enjoy Crabbe fully, we ought perhaps to be acclimatised on the coast of the Eastern Counties ; we should become sensitive to the plaintive music of the scenery, which is now generally drowned by the discordant sounds of modern watering-places, and would seem insipid to a generation which values excitement in scenery as in fiction. Readers, who measure the beauty of a district by its average height above the sea-level, and who cannot appreciate the charm of a 'waste enormous marsh,' may find Crabbe uncongenial.

The human character is determined, as Mr. Buckle and other philosophers have assured us, by the climate and the

soil. A little ingenuity, such as those philosophers display in accommodating facts to theory, might discover a parallel between the type of Crabbe's personages and the fauna and flora of his native district. Declining a task which might lead to fanciful conclusions, I may assume that the East Anglian character is sufficiently familiar, whatever the causes by which it has been determined. To define Crabbe's poetry we have simply to imagine ourselves listening to the stories of his parishioners, told by a clergyman brought up amongst the lower rank of the middle classes, scarcely elevated above their prejudices, and not willingly leaving their circle of ideas. We must endow him with that simplicity of character which gives us frequent cause to smile at its proprietor, but which does not disqualify him from seeing a great deal further into his neighbours than they are apt to give him credit for doing. Such insight, in fact, is due not to any great subtlety of intellect, but to the possession of deep feeling and sympathy. Crabbe saw little more of Burke than would have been visible to an ordinary Suffolk farmer. When transplanted to a ducal mansion, he only drew the pretty obvious inference, embodied in a vigorous poem, that a patron is a very disagreeable and at times a very mischievous personage. The joys and griefs which really interest him are of the very tangible and solid kind which affect men and women to whom the struggle for existence is a stern reality. Here and there his good-humoured but rather clumsy ridicule may strike some lady to whom some demon has whispered 'have a taste;' and who turns up her nose at the fat bacon on Mr. Tovell's table. He pities her squeamishness, but thinks it rather unreasonable. He satirises too the heads of the rustic aristocracy; the brutal squire who bullies his nephew the clergyman for

preaching against his vices, and corrupts the whole neighbourhood ; or the speculative banker who cheats old maids under pretence of looking after their investments. If the squire does not generally appear in Crabbe in the familiar dramatic character of a rural Lovelace, it is chiefly because Crabbe has no great belief in the general purity of the inferior ranks of rural life. But his most powerful stories deal with the tragedies—only too lifelike of the shop and the farm. He describes the temptations which lead the small tradesman to adulterate his goods, or the parish clerk to embezzle the money subscribed in the village church, and the evil influence of dissenting families in fostering a spiritual pride which leads to more unctuous hypocrisy ; for, though he says of the wicked squire that

> His worship ever was a Churchman true,
> And held in scorn the Methodistic crew,

the scorn is only objectionable to him in so far as it is a cynical cloak for scorn of good morals. He tells how boys run away to sea, or join strolling players, and have in consequence to beg their bread at the end of their days. The almshouse or the county gaol is the natural end of his villains, and he paints to the life the evil courses which generally lead to such a climax. Nobody describes better the process of going to the dogs. And most of all, he sympathises with the village maiden who has listened too easily to the voice of the charmer, in the shape of a gay sailor or a smart London footman, and has to reap the bitter consequences of her too easy faith. Most of his stories might be paralleled by the experience of any country clergyman who has entered into the life of his parishioners. They are as commonplace and as pathetic as the things which are happening round us every day, and which fill a

neglected paragraph in a country newspaper. The treatment varies from the purely humorous to the most deep and genuine pathos ; though it never takes us into the regions of the loftier imagination.

The more humorous of these performances may be briefly dismissed. Crabbe possesses the faculty, but not in any eminent degree ; his hand is a little heavy, and one must remember that Mr. Tovell and his like were of the race who require to have a joke driven into their heads with a sledge-hammer. Once or twice we come upon a sketch which may help to explain Miss Austen's admiration. There is an old maid devoted to Mira, and rejoicing in stuffed puppies and parrots, who might have been ridiculed by Emma Woodhouse, and a parson who would have suited the Eltons admirably :—

> Fiddling and fishing were his arts ; at times
> He altered sermons and he aimed at rhymes ;
> And his fair friends, not yet intent on cards,
> Oft he amused with riddles and charades.

Such sketches are a pleasant relief to his more sombre portraiture ; but it is in the tragic elements that his true power comes out. The motives of his stories may be trivial, but never the sentiment. The deep manly emotion makes us forget not only the frequent clumsiness of his style but the pettiness of the incident, and, what is more difficult, the rather bread-and-butter tone of morality. If he is a little too fond of bringing his villains to the gallows, he is preoccupied less by the external consequences than by the natural working of evil passions. With him sin is not punished by being found out, but by disintegrating the character and blunting the higher sensibilities. He shows—and the moral, if not new, is that which possesses the

really intellectual interest—how evil-doers are tortured by the cravings of desires that cannot be satisfied, and the lacerations inflicted by ruined self-respect. And therefore there is a truth in Crabbe's delineations which is quite independent of his more or less rigid administration of poetical justice. His critics used to accuse him of having a low opinion of human nature. It is quite true that he assigns to selfishness and brutal passion a very large part in carrying on the machinery of the world. Some readers may infer that he was unlucky in his experience, and others that he loved facts too unflinchingly. His stories sometimes remind one of Balzac's in the descriptions of selfishness triumphant over virtue. One, for example, of his deeply pathetic poems is called 'The Brothers;' and repeats the old contrast given in Fielding's Tom Jones and Blifil. The shrewd sly hypocrite has received all manner of kindnesses from the generous and simple sailor, and when, at last, the poor sailor is ruined in health and fortune, he comes home expecting to be supported by the gratitude of the brother, who has by this time made money and is living at his ease. Nothing can be more pathetic or more in the spirit of some of Balzac's stories than the way in which the rich man receives his former benefactor; his faint recognition of fraternal feelings gradually cools down under the influence of a selfish wife; till at last the poor old sailor is driven from the parlour to the kitchen, and from the kitchen to the loft, and finally deprived of his only comfort, his intercourse with a young nephew not yet broken into hardness of heart, on the plea that the lad is not to be corrupted by the coarse language of his poor old uncle. The rich brother suspects that the sailor has broken this rule, and is reviling him for his ingratitude, when suddenly he discovers that he

is abusing a corpse. The old sailor's heart is broken at last ; and his brother repents too late. He tries to comfort his remorse by cross-examining the boy, who was the cause of the last quarrel :—

> 'Did he not curse me, child?' 'He never cursed,
> But could not breathe, and said his heart would burst.'
> 'And so will mine'——'But, father, you must pray ;
> My Uncle said it took his pains away.'

Praying, however, cannot bring back the dead ; and the fratricide, for such he feels himself to be, is a melancholy man to the end of his days. In Balzac's hands repentance would have had no place, and selfishness have been finally triumphant and unabashed. We need not ask which would be the most effective or the truest treatment ; though I must put in a word for the superior healthiness of Crabbe's mind. There is nothing morbid about him. Still it would be absurd to push such a comparison far. Crabbe's portraits are only spirited vignettes compared with the elaborate full-lengths drawn by the intense imagination of the French novelist ; and Crabbe's whole range of thought is incomparably narrower. The two writers have a real resemblance only in so far as in each case a powerful accumulation of life-like details enables them to produce a pathos, powerful by its vivid reality.

The singular power of Crabbe is in some sense more conspicuous in the stories where the incidents are almost audaciously trifling. One of them begins with this not very impressive and very ungrammatical couplet :—

> With our late Vicar, and his age the same,
> His clerk, hight Jachin, to his office came.

Jachin is a man of oppressive respectability ; so oppressive, indeed, that some of the scamps of the borough try to get

him into scrapes by temptations of a very inartificial kind, which he is strong enough to resist. At last, however, it occurs to Jachin that he can easily embezzle part of the usual monthly offerings while saving his character in his own eyes by some obvious sophistry. He is detected and dismissed, and dies after coming upon the parish. These materials for a tragic poem are not very promising ; and I do not mean to say that the sorrows of poor Jachin affect us as deeply as those of Gretchen or Desdemona. The parish-clerk is perhaps a fit type of all that was least poetical in the old social order of the country, and virtue which succumbs to the temptation of taking two shillings out of a plate scarcely wants a Mephistopheles to overcome it. We may perhaps think that the apologetic note which the excellent Crabbe inserts at the end of his poem, to the effect that he did not mean by it to represent mankind as 'puppets of an overpowering destiny,' or 'to deny the doctrine of seducing spirits,' is a little superfluous. The fact that a parish-clerk has taken to petty pilfering can scarcely justify those heterodox conclusions. But when we have smiled at Crabbe's philosophy, we begin to wonder at the force of his sentiment. A blighted human soul is a pathetic object, however paltry the temptation to which it has succumbed. Jachin has the dignity of despair, though he is not quite a fallen archangel ; and Crabbe's favourite scenery harmonises with his agony.

> In each lone place, dejected and dismayed,
> Shrinking from view, his wasting form he laid,
> Or to the restless sea and roaring wind
> Gave the strong yearnings of a ruined mind ;
> On the broad beach, the silent summer day,
> Stretched on some wreck, he wore his life away ;

> Or where the river mingles with the sea,
> Or on the mudbank by the elder tree,
> Or by the bounding marsh-dyke, there was he.

Nor would he have been a more pitiable object if he had betrayed a nation or sold his soul for a Garter instead of the pillage of a subscription plate. Poor old Jachin's story may seem to be borrowed from a commonplace tract ; but the detected pilferer, though he has only lost the respect of the parson, the overseer, and the beadle, touches us as deeply as the Byronic hero who has fallen out with the whole system of the world.

If we refuse to sympathise with the pang due to so petty a catastrophe—though our sympathy should surely be proportioned to the keenness of the suffering rather than the absolute height of the fall—we may turn to tragedy of a deeper dye. Peter Grimes, as his name indicates, was a ruffian from his infancy. He once knocked down his poor old father, who warned him of the consequences of his brutality :—

> On an inn-settle, in his maudlin grief,
> This he revolved, and drank for his relief.

Adopting such a remedy, he sank from bad to worse, and gradually became a thief, a smuggler, and a social outlaw. In those days, however, as is proved by the history of Mrs. Brownrigg, parish authorities practised the 'boarding-out system' after a reckless fashion. Peter was allowed to take two or three apprentices in succession, whom he bullied, starved, and maltreated, and who finally died under suspicious circumstances. The last was found dead in Peter's fishing-boat after a rough voyage: and though nothing could be proved, the Mayor told him that he should have no more slaves to belabour. Peter pursuing his trade in solitude, gradually became morbid and depressed. The

melancholy estuary became haunted by ghostly visions. He had to groan and sweat with no vent for his passion :—

> Thus by himself compelled to live each day,
> To wait for certain hours the tide's delay ;
> At the same time the same dull views to see,
> The bounding marsh-bank and the blighted tree ;
> The water only, when the tides were high,
> When low, the mud half-covered and half-dry ;
> The sun-burnt tar that blisters on the planks,
> And bank-side stakes in their uneven ranks ;
> Heaps of entangled weeds that slowly float,
> As the tide rolls by the impeded boat.

Peter grew more sullen, and the scenery became more weird and depressing. The few who watched him remarked that there were three places where Peter seemed to be more than usually moved. For a time he hurried past them, whistling as he rowed ; but gradually he seemed to be fascinated. The idle loungers in the summer saw a man and boat lingering in the tideway, apparently watching the gliding waves without casting a net or looking at the wildfowl. At last, his delirium becoming stronger, he is carried to the poor-house, and tells his story to the clergyman. Nobody has painted with greater vigour that kind of externalised conscience which may still survive in a brutalised mind. Peter Grimes, of course, sees his victim's spirits and hates them. He fancies that his father torments him out of spite, characteristically forgetting that the ghost had some excuse for his anger :—

> 'Twas one hot noon, all silent, still, serene,
> No living being had I lately seen ;
> I paddled up and down and dipped my net,
> But (such his pleasure) I could nothing get—
> A father's pleasure, when his toil was done,
> To plague and torture thus an only son !

> And so I sat and looked upon the stream,
> How it ran on, and felt as in a dream;
> But dream it was not; no!—I fixed my eyes
> On the mid stream and saw the spirits rise;
> I saw my father on the water stand,
> And hold a thin pale boy in either hand;
> And there they glided ghastly on the top
> Of the salt flood, and never touched a drop;
> I would have struck them, but they knew the intent,
> And smiled upon the oar, and down they went.

Remorse in Peter's mind takes the shape of bitter hatred for his victims; and with another characteristic confusion, he partly attributes his sufferings to some evil influence intrinsic in the locality:—

> There were three places, where they ever rose—
> The whole long river has not such as those—
> Places accursed, where if a man remain,
> He'll see the things which strike him to the brain.

And then the malevolent ghosts forced poor Peter to lean on his oars, and showed him visions of coming horrors. Grimes dies impenitent, and fancying that his tormentors are about to seize him. Of all haunted men in fiction, it is not easy to think of a case where the horror is more terribly realised. The blood-boulter'd Banquo tortured a noble victim, but scarcely tortured him more effectually. Peter Grimes was doubtless a close relation of Peter Bell. Bell having the advantage of Wordsworth's interpretation, leads us to many thoughts which lie altogether beyond Crabbe's reach; but, looking simply at the sheer tragic force of the two characters, Grimes is to Bell what brandy is to small beer. He would never have shown the white feather like his successor, who,

> After ten months' melancholy,
> Became a good and honest man.

If, in some sense, Peter Grimes is the most effective of Crabbe's heroes, he would, if taken alone, give a very distorted impression of the general spirit of the poetry. It is only at intervals that he introduces us to downright criminals. There is, indeed, a description of a convicted felon, which, according to Macaulay, has made 'many a rough and cynical reader cry like a child,' and which, if space were unlimited, would make a striking pendant to the agony of the burdened Grimes. But, as a rule, Crabbe can find motives enough for tenderness in sufferings which have nothing to do with the criminal law, and of which the mere framework of the story is often interesting enough. His peculiar power is best displayed in so presenting to us the sorrows of commonplace characters as to make us feel that a shabby coat and a narrow education, and the most unromantic of characters, need not cut off our sympathies with a fellow-creature; and that the dullest tradesman who treads on our toes in an omnibus may want only a power of articulate expression to bring before us some of the deepest of all problems. The parish-clerk and the grocer—or whatever may be the proverbial epitome of human dulness—may swell the chorus of lamentation over the barrenness and the hardships and the wasted energies and the harsh discords of life which is always 'steaming up' from the world, and to which it is one, though perhaps not the highest, of the poet's functions to make us duly sensible. Crabbe, like all realistic writers, must be studied at full length, and therefore quotations are necessarily unjust. It will be sufficient if I refer—pretty much at random—to the short story of 'Phœbe Dawson' in the 'Parish Register,' to the more elaborate stories of 'Edward Shore' and the 'Parting Hour' in the 'Tales,' or to the story of 'Ruth' in the Tales of

the Hall,' where again the dreary pathos is strangely heightened by Crabbe's favourite seaport scenery, to prove that he might be called as truly as Goldsmith *affectuum potens*, though scarcely *lenis*, *dominator*.

It is time, however, to conclude with a word or two as to Crabbe's peculiar place in the history of English literature. I said that, unlike his contemporaries, Cowper and Burns, he adhered rigidly to the form of the earlier eighteenth-century school, and partly for this reason excited the wayward admiration of Byron, who always chose to abuse the bridge which carried him to fame. But Crabbe's clumsiness of expression makes him a very inadequate successor of Pope or of Goldsmith, and his claims are really founded on the qualities which led Byron to call him 'nature's sternest painter, yet her best.' On this side he is connected with some tendencies of the school which supplanted his early models. So far as Wordsworth and his followers represented the reaction from the artificial to a love of unsophisticated nature, Crabbe is entirely at one with them. He did not share that unlucky taste for the namby-pamby by which Wordsworth annoyed his contemporaries, and spoilt some of his earlier poems. Its place was filled in Crabbe's mind by an even more unfortunate disposition for the simply humdrum and commonplace, which, it must be confessed, makes it almost as hard to read a good many of his verses as to consume large quantities of suet pudding, and has probably destroyed his popularity with the present generation. Still, Crabbe's influence was powerful as against the old conventionality. He did not, like his predecessors, write upon the topics which interested 'persons of quality,' and never gives us the impression of having composed his rhymes in a full-bottomed wig or even in a Grub Street

garret. He has gone out into country fields and village lanes, and paints directly from man and nature, with almost a cynical disregard of the accepted code of propriety. But the points on which he parts company with his more distinguished contemporaries are equally obvious. Mr. Stopford Brooke has lately been telling us with great eloquence what is the theology which underlies the poetical tendencies of the last generation of poets. Of that creed—a sufficiently vague one, it must be admitted—Crabbe was by no means an apostle. Rather one would say he was as indifferent as a good old-fashioned clergyman could very well be to the existence of any new order of ideas in the world. The infidels, whom he sometimes attacks, read Bolingbroke, and Chubb, and Mandeville, and have only heard by report even of the existence of Voltaire. The Dissenters, whom he so heartily detests, have listened to Whitefield and Wesley, or perhaps to Huntington, S.S.—that is, as it may now be necessary to explain, Sinner Saved. Every newer development of thought was still far away from the quiet pews of Aldborough, and the only form of church restoration of which he has heard is the objectionable practice of painting a new wall to represent a growth of lichens. Crabbe appreciates the charm of the picturesque, but has never yet heard of our elaborate methods of creating modern antiques. Lapped in such ignorance, and with a mind little given to speculation, it is only in character that Crabbe should be totally insensible to the various moods of thought represented by Wordsworth's pantheistic conceptions of nature, or by Shelley's dreamy idealism, or Byron's fierce revolutionary impulses. Still less, if possible, could he sympathise with that love of beauty, pure and simple, of which Keats was the first prophet. He might, indeed, be briefly described

by saying that he is at the very opposite pole from Keats. The more bigoted admirers of Keats—for there are bigots in matters of taste or poetry as well as in science or theology or politics—would refuse the title of poet to Crabbe altogether on the strength of the absence of this element from his verses. Like his most obvious parallels in painting, he is too fond of boors and pothouses to be allowed the quality of artistic perception. I will not argue the point, which is, perhaps, rather a question of classification than of intrinsic merit; but I will venture to suggest a test which will, I think, give Crabbe a very firm, though, it may be, not a very lofty place. Though I should be unwilling to be reckoned as one of Macaulay's 'rough and cynical readers,' I admit that I can read the story of the convicted felon, or of Peter Grimes, without indulging in downright blubbering. Most readers, I fear, can in these days get through pathetic poems and novels without absolutely using their pocket-handkerchiefs. But though Crabbe may not prompt such outward and visible signs of emotion, I think that he produces a more distinct tendency to tears than almost any poet of his time. True, he does not appeal to emotions accessible only through the finer intellectual perceptions, or to the thoughts which 'lie too deep for tears.' That prerogative belongs to men of more intense character, greater philosophical power, and more delicate instincts. But the power of touching readers by downright pictures of homespun griefs and sufferings is one which, to my mind, implies some poetical capacity, and which clearly belongs to Crabbe.

WILLIAM HAZLITT

THERE are few great books or great men that do not sadden us by a sense of incompleteness. The writer, we feel, is better than his work. His full power only reveals itself by flashes. There are blemishes in his design, due to mere oversight or indolence; his energy has flagged, or he has alloyed his pure gold to please the mob; or some burst of wayward passion has disturbed the fair proportions of his work, and the man himself is a half-finished or half-ruined fragment. The rough usage of the world leaves its mark on the spiritual constitution of even the strongest and best amongst us; and perhaps the finest natures suffer more than others in virtue of their finer sympathies. 'Hamlet' is a pretty good performance, if we make allowances; but what would it have been if Shakespeare could have been at his highest level all through, and if every element of strength in him had been purified from every weakness? What would it have been, shall we say, if he could have had the advantage of reading a few modern lectures on æsthetics? We may, perhaps, be content with Shakespeare as circumstances left him; but in reading our modern poets the sentiment of regret is stronger. If Byron had not been driven into his wild revolt against the world; if Shelley had been judiciously treated from his youth; if Keats had had healthier lungs; if Wordsworth had not grown rusty in his

solitude; if Scott had not been tempted into publisher's speculations; if Coleridge had never taken to opium—what great poems might not have opened the new era of literature, where now we have but incomplete designs, and listen to harmonies half destroyed by internal discord? The regret, however, is less when a man has succeeded in uttering the thought that was in him, though it may never have found a worthy expression. Wordsworth could have told us little more, though the 'Excursion' had been as complete a work as 'Paradise Lost:' and if Scott might have written more 'Waverleys' and 'Antiquaries' and 'Old Mortalities,' he could hardly have written better ones. But the works of some other writers suggest possibilities which never even approached fulfilment. If the opinion formed by his contemporaries of Coleridge be anywhere near the truth, we lost in him a potential philosopher of a very high order, as we more clearly lost a poet of singular fascination. Coleridge naturally suggests the name of De Quincey, whose works are as often tantalising as satisfying. And to make, it is true, a considerable drop from the greatest of these names, we often feel when we take up one of Hazlitt's glowing Essays, that here, too, was a man who might have made a far more enduring mark as a writer of English prose. At their best, his writings are admirable; they have the true stamp; the thought is masculine and the expression masterly; phrases engrave themselves on the memory; and we catch glimpses of a genuine thinker, and no mere manufacturer of literary commonplace. On a more prolonged study, it is true, we become conscious of many shortcomings, and the general effect is somehow rather cloying, though hardly from an excess of sweetness. And yet he deserves the study both of the critic and of the student of character.

The story of Hazlitt's life has been told by his grandson : but there is a rather curious defect of materials for so recent a biography. He kept, it seems, no letters,—a weakness, if it be a weakness, for which one is rather apt to applaud him in these days ; but, on the other hand, nobody ever indulged more persistently in the habit of washing his dirty linen in public. Not even his idol Rousseau could be more demonstrative of his feelings and recollections. His Essays are autobiographical, sometimes even offensively ; and after reading them we are even more familiar than his contemporaries with many points of his character. He loved to pour himself out in his Essays

> as plain
> As downright Shippen or as old Montaigne.

He has laid bare for the most careless reader the main elements of his singular composition. Like some others of his revolutionary friends, Godwin, for example, Leigh Hunt, and Tom Paine, he represents the old dissenting spirit in a new incarnation. The grandfather a stern Calvinist, the father a Unitarian, the son a freethinker ; those were the gradations through which more than one family passed during the closing years of the last century and the opening of this. One generation still clung to the old Puritan traditions and Jonathan Edwards ; the next followed Priestley ; and the third joined the little band of radicals who read Cobbett, scorned Southey as a deserter, and refused to be frightened by the French Revolution. The outside crust of opinion may be shed with little change to the inner man. Hazlitt was a dissenter to his backbone. He was born to be in a minority ; to be a living protest against the dominant creed and constitution. He recognised and denounced, but he never shook off the faults characteristic of small

sects. A want of wide intellectual culture, and a certain sourness of temper, cramped his powers and sometimes marred his writing. But from his dissenting forefathers Hazlitt inherited something better. Besides the huge tomes of controversial divinity on his father's shelves, the 'Patres Poloni,' Pripscovius, Crellius and Cracovius, Lardner and Doddridge, and Baxter and Bates, and Howe, were the legends of the Puritan hagiology. The old dissenters, he tells us, had Neale's 'History of the Puritans' by heart, and made their children read Calamy's account of the 2,000 ejected ministers along with the stories of Daniel in the Lion's Den and Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego. Sympathy for the persecuted, unbending resistance to the oppressor, was the creed which had passed into their blood. 'This covenant they kept as the stars keep their courses; this principle they stuck by, for want of knowing better, as it sticks by them to the last. It grew with their growth, it does not wither in their decay. . . . It glimmers with the last feeble eyesight, smiles in the faded cheek like infancy, and lights a path before them to the grave. This'—for in Hazlitt lies a personal application in all his moralising—'This is better than the whirligig life of a court poet'—such, for example, as Robert Southey.

But Hazlitt's descent was not pure. If we could trace back the line of his ancestry we should expect to find that by some freak of fortune one of the rigid old Puritans had married a descendant of some great Flemish or Italian painter. Love of graceful forms and bright colouring and voluptuous sensations had been transmitted to their descendants, though hitherto repressed by the stern discipline of British nonconformity. As the discipline relaxed the Hazlitts reverted to the ancestral type. Hazlitt himself,

his brother and his sister, were painters by instinct. The brother became a painter of miniatures by profession ; and Hazlitt to the end of his days revered Titian almost as much as he revered his great idol Napoleon. An odd pair of idols, one thinks, for a youth brought up upon Pripscovius and his brethren ! A keen delight in all artistic and natural beauty was an awkward endowment for a youth intended for the ministry. Keats was scarcely more out of place in a surgery than Hazlitt would have been in a Unitarian pulpit of those days, and yet from that pulpit, oddly enough, came the greatest impulse to Hazlitt. It came from a man who, like Hazlitt himself, though in a higher degree than Hazlitt, combined the artistic and the philosophic temperament. Coleridge, as Hazlitt somewhere says, threw a great stone into the standing pool of contemporary thought ; and it was in January 1798—one of the many dates in his personal history to which he recurs with unceasing fondness—that Hazlitt rose before daylight and walked ten miles in the mud to hear Coleridge preach. He has told, in his graphic manner, how the voice of the preacher 'rose like a stream of rich distilled perfumes ;' how he launched into his subject, after giving out the text, 'like an eagle dallying with the wind ;' and how his young hearer seemed to be listening to the music of the spheres, to see the union of poetry and philosophy ; and behold truth and genius embracing under the eye of religion. His description of the youthful Coleridge has a fit pendant in the wonderful description of the full-blown philosopher in Carlyle's 'Life of Sterling ;' where, indeed, one or two touches are taken from Hazlitt's Essays. It is Hazlitt who remarked, even at this early meeting, that the dreamy poet-philosopher could never decide on which side of the

footpath he should walk ; and Hazlitt who struck out the epigram that Coleridge was an excellent talker if allowed to start from no premisses and come to no conclusion. The glamour of Coleridge's theosophy never seems to have fascinated Hazlitt's stubborn intellect. At this time, indeed, Coleridge had not yet been inoculated with German mysticism. In after years, the disciple, according to his custom, renounced his master and assailed him with half-regretful anger. But the intercourse and kindly encouragement of so eminent a man seemed to have roused Hazlitt's ambition. His poetical and his speculative intellect were equally stirred. The youth was already longing to write a philosophical treatise. The two elements of his nature thus roused to action led him along a 'strange diagonal.' He would be at once a painter and a metaphysician. Some eight years of artistic labour convinced him that he could not be a Titian or a Raphael, and he declined to be a mere Hazlitt junior. His metaphysical studies, on the contrary, convinced him that he might be a Hume or a Berkeley ; but unluckily they convinced himself alone. The tiny volume which contained their results was neglected by everybody but the author, who, to the end of his days, loved it with the love of a mother for a deformed child. It is written, to say the truth, in a painful and obscure style ; it is the work of a man who has brooded over his own thoughts in solitude till he cannot appreciate the need of a clear exposition. The narrowness of his reading had left him in ignorance of the new aspects under which the eternal problems were presenting themselves to the new generation ; and a metaphysical discussion in antiquated phraseology is as useless as a lady's dress in the last year's fashion. Hazlitt, in spite of this double failure, does not

seem to have been much disturbed by impecuniosity ; but the most determined Bohemian has to live. For some years he stayed about the purlieus of literature, drudging, translating, and doing other cobbler's work. Two of his performances, however, were characteristic : he wrote an attack upon Malthus, and he made an imprudent marriage. Even Malthusians must admit that imprudent marriages may have some accidental good consequences. When a man has fairly got his back to the wall, he is forced to fight ; and Hazlitt, at the age of thirty-four, with a wife and a son, at last discovered the great secret of the literary profession, that a clever man can write when he has to write or starve. To compose had been labour and grief to him, so long as he could potter round a thought indefinitely ; but with the printer's devil on one side and the demands of a family on the other, his ink began to flow freely, and during the last fifteen or seventeen years of his life he became a voluminous though fragmentary author. Several volumes of essays, lectures, and criticisms, besides his more ambitious 'Life of Napoleon,' and a great deal of anonymous writing, attest his industry. He died in 1830, at the age of fifty-two ; leaving enough to show that he could have done more, and a good deal of a rare, if not of the highest kind of excellence.

Hazlitt, as I have said, is everywhere autobiographical. Besides that secret, that a man can write if he must, he had discovered the further secret that the easiest of all topics is his own feelings. It is an apparent paradox, though the explanation is not far to seek, that Hazlitt, though shy with his friends, was the most unreserved of writers. Indeed he takes the public into his confidence with a facility which we cannot easily forgive. Biographers of late have been guilty

of flagrant violations of the unwritten code which should protect the privacies of social life from the intrusions of public curiosity. But the most unscrupulous of biographers would hardly have dared to tear aside the veil so audaciously as Hazlitt, in one conspicuous instance at least, chose to do for himself. His idol Rousseau had indeed gone further; but when Rousseau told the story of his youth, it was at least seen through a long perspective of years, and his own personality might seem to be scarcely interested. Hazlitt chose, in the strange book called the 'New Pygmalion,' or 'Liber Amoris,' to invite the British public at large to look on at a strange tragi-comedy, of which the last scene was scarcely finished. Hazlitt had long been unhappy in his family life. His wife appears to have been a masculine woman, with no talent for domesticity; completely indifferent to her husband's pursuits, and inclined to despise him for so fruitless an employment of his energies. They had already separated, it seems, when Hazlitt fell desperately in love with Miss Sarah Walker, the daughter of his lodging-house keeper. The husband and wife agreed to obtain a divorce under the Scotch law, after which they might follow their own paths, and Sarah Walker become the second Mrs. Hazlitt. Some months had to be spent by Mr. and Mrs. Hazlitt in Edinburgh, with a view to this arrangement. The lady's journal records her impressions; which, it would seem, strongly resembled those of a tradesman getting rid of a rather flighty and imprudent partner in business. She is extremely precise as to all pecuniary and legal details; she calls upon her husband now and then, takes tea with him, makes an off-hand remark or two about some picture-gallery which he had been visiting, and tells him that he has made a fool of

himself, with the calmness of a lady dismissing a troublesome servant, or a schoolmaster parting from an ill-behaved pupil. And meanwhile, in queer contrast, Hazlitt was pouring out to his friends letters which seem to be throbbing with unrestrainable passion. He is raving as Romeo at Mantua might have raved about Juliet. To hear Miss Walker called his wife will be music to his ears, such as they never heard. But it seems doubtful whether, after all, his Juliet will have him. He shrieks mere despair and suicide. Nothing is left in the world to give him a drop of comfort. The breeze does not cool him nor the blue sky delight him. He will never lie down at night nor rise up of a morning in peace, nor even behold his little boy's face with pleasure, unless he is restored to her favour. And Mrs. Hazlitt reports, after acknowledging the receipt of £10, that Mr. Hazlitt was so much 'enamoured' of one of these letters that he pulled it out of his pocket twenty times a day, wanted to read it to his companions, and ranted and gesticulated till people took him for a madman. The 'Liber Amoris' is made out of these letters—more or less altered and disguised, with some reports of conversations with the lovely Sarah. 'It was an explosion of frenzy,' says De Quincey; his reckless mode of relieving his bosom of certain perilous stuff, with little care whether it produced scorn or sympathy. A passion which urges its victim to such improprieties should be, at least, deep and genuine. One would have liked him better if he had not taken his frenzy to market. The 'Liber Amoris' tells us accordingly that the author, Hazlitt's imaginary double, died abroad, 'of disappointment preying on a sickly frame and morbid state of mind.' The hero, in short, breaks his heart when the lady marries somebody else. Hazlitt's heart was more

elastic. Miss Sarah Walker married, and Hazlitt next year married a widow lady 'of some property,' made a tour with her on the Continent, and then—quarrelled with her also. It is not a pretty story. Hazlitt's biographer informs us, by way of excuse, that his grandfather was 'physically incapable'—whatever that may mean—'of fixing his affection upon a single object.' He 'comprehended,' indeed, 'the worth of constancy' and other virtues as well as most men, and could have written about them better than most men; but somehow 'a sinister influence or agency,' a periphrasis for a sensuous temperament, was perpetually present, which confined his virtues to the sphere of theory. An apology sometimes is worse than a satire. The case, however, seems to be sufficiently plain. We need not suspect that Hazlitt was consciously acting a part and nursing his 'frenzy' because he thought that it would make a startling book. He was an egotist and a man of impulse. His impressions were for the time overpowering; but they were transient. His temper was often stronger than his passions. A gust of anger would make him quarrel with his oldest friends. Every emotion justified itself for the time, because it was his. He always did well, whether it pleased him for the moment to be angry, to be in love, to be cynical, or to be furiously indignant. The end, therefore, of his life exhibits a series of short impetuous fits of passionate endeavour, rather than devotion to a single overruling purpose; and all his writings are brief outbursts of eloquent feeling, where neither the separate fragments nor the works considered as a whole obey any law of logical development. And yet, in some ways, Hazlitt boasted, and boasted plausibly enough, of his constancy. He has the same ideas to the end of his life that he had at fourteen. He would, he remarks, be an

excellent man on a jury ; he would say little, but would starve the eleven other obstinate fellows out. Amongst politicians he was a faithful Abdiel, when all others had deserted the cause. He loved the books of his boyhood, the fields where he had walked, the gardens where he had drunk tea, and, to a rather provoking extent, the old quotations and old stories which he had used from his first days of authorship. The explanation of the apparent paradox gives the clue to Hazlitt's singular character.

What I have called Hazlitt's egotism is more euphemistically and perhaps more accurately described by Talfourd,[1] as 'an intense consciousness of his own individual being.' The word egotism in our rough estimates of character is too easily confounded with selfishness. Hazlitt might have been the person who, as one making a strange confession, assured a friend that he took a deep interest in his own concerns. He was, one would say, decidedly unselfish, if by selfishness is meant a disposition to feather one's own nest without regard for other people's wants. Still less was he selfish in the sense of preferring solid bread and butter to the higher needs of mind and spirit. His sentiments are always generous, and if scorn is too familiar a mood, it is scorn of the base and servile. But his peculiarity is that these generous feelings are always associated with some special case. He sees every abstract principle by the concrete instance. He hates insolence in the abstract, but his hatred flames into passion when it is insolence to Hazlitt. He resembles that good old lady who wrote on the margin of her 'Complete Duty of Man' the name of that neighbour who most conspicuously sinned against the precept

[1] In his excellent Essay prefixed to 'Hazlitt's Literary Remains.'

in the opposite text. Tyranny with Hazlitt is named Pitt, party spite is Gifford, apostasy is Southey, and fidelity may be called Cobbett or Godwin; though he finds names for the vices much more easily than for the virtues. And thus, if he cannot be condemned for selfishness, one must be charitable not to put down a good many of his offences to its sister jealousy. The personal and the public sentiments are so invariably blended in his mind that neither he nor anybody else could have analysed their composition. He was apt to be the more moody and irritable because his resentments clothed themselves spontaneously in the language of some nobler emotion. If his friends are cold, he bewails the fickleness of humanity; if they are successful, it is not envy that prompts his irritation, but the rarity of the correspondence between merit and reward. Such a man is more faithful to his dead than to his living friends. The dead cannot change; they always come back to his memory in their old colours; their names recall the old tender emotion placed above all change and chance. But who can tell that our dearest living friend may not come into awkward collision with us before he has left the room? It is as well to be on our guard! It is curious how the two feelings alternate in Hazlitt's mind in regard to the friends who are at once dead and living; how fondly he dwells upon the Coleridge of Wem and Nether Stowey, where he first listened to the enchanter's voice, and with what bitterness, which is yet but soured affection, he turns upon the Coleridge who defended war-taxes in the 'Friend.' He hacks and hews at Southey through several furious Essays, and ends with a groan. 'We met him unexpectedly the other day in St. Giles's,' he says, 'were sorry we had passed him without speaking to an old friend, turned and

looked after him for some time as to a tale of other days—sighing, as we walked on, Alas, poor Southey!' He fancies himself to be in the mood of Brutus murdering Cæsar. It is patriotism struggling with old associations of friendship; if there is any personal element in the hostility, no one is less conscious of it than the possessor. To the whole Lake school his attitude is always the same—justice done grudgingly in spite of anger, or satire tempered by remorse. No one could say nastier things of that very different egotist, Wordsworth; nor could anyone, outside the sacred clique, pay him heartier compliments. Nobody, indeed, can dislike egotism like an egotist. 'Wordsworth,' says Hazlitt, 'sees nothing but himself and the universe; he hates all greatness and all pretensions to it but his own. His egotism is in this respect a madness, for he scorns even the admiration of himself, thinking it a presumption in anyone to suppose that he has taste or sense enough to understand him. He hates all science and all art: he hates chemistry, he hates conchology, he hates Sir Isaac Newton, he hates logic, he hates metaphysics,' and so on through a long list of hatreds, ending with the inimitable Napoleon, whom Wordsworth hates, it seems, 'to get rid of the idea of anything greater, or thought to be greater, than himself. Hazlitt might have made out a tolerable list of his own antipathies; though, to do him justice, of antipathies balanced by ardent enthusiasm, especially for the dead or the distant.

Hazlitt, indeed, was incapable of the superlative self-esteem here attributed to Wordsworth. His egotism is a curious variety of that Protean passion, compounded as skilfully as the melancholy of Jaques. It is not the fascinating and humorous egotism of Lamb, who disarms us

beforehand by a smile at his own crotchets. Hazlitt is too serious to be playful. Nor is it like the amusing egotism of Boswell, combined with a vanity which evades our contempt, because it asks so frankly for sympathy. Hazlitt is too proud and too bitter. Neither is it the misanthropic egotism of Byron, which, through all its affectation, implies a certain aristocratic contempt of the world and its laws. Hazlitt has not the sweep and continuity of Byron's passion. His egotism—be it said without offence—is dashed with something of the feeling common amongst his dissenting friends. He feels the awkwardness which prevails amongst a clique branded by a certain social stigma, and despises himself for his awkwardness. He resents neglect and scorns to ask for patronage. His egotism is a touchy and wayward feeling which takes the mask of misanthropy. He is always meditating upon his own qualities, but not in the spirit of the conceited man who plumes himself upon his virtues, nor of the ascetic who broods over his vices. He prefers the apparently self-contradictory attitude (but human nature is illogical) of meditating with remorse upon his own virtues. What in others is complacency becomes with him, ostensibly, at least, self-reproach. He affects—but it is hard to say where the affectation begins—to be annoyed by the contemplation of his own merits. He is angry with the world for preferring commonplace to genius, and rewarding stupidity by success ; but in form, at least, he mocks at his own folly for expecting better things. If he is vain at bottom, his vanity shows itself indirectly by depreciating his neighbours. He is too proud to dwell upon his own virtues, but he has been convinced by impartial observation that the world at large is in a conspiracy against merit. Thus he manages to transform his self-

consciousness into the semblance of proud humility, and extracts a bitter and rather morbid pleasure from dwelling upon his disappointments and failures. Half-a-dozen of his best Essays give expression to this mood, which is rather bitter than querulous. He enlarges cordially on the 'disadvantages of intellectual superiority.' An author—Hazlitt, to wit—is not allowed to relax into dulness; if he is brilliant he is not understood, and if he professes an interest in common things it is assumed that then he must be a fool. And yet in the midst of these grumblings he is forced to admit a touch of weakness, and tells us how it pleases him to hear a man ask in the Fives Court, 'Which is Mr. Hazlitt?' He, the most idiosyncratic of men, and most proud of it at bottom, declares how 'he hates his style to be known, as he hates all idiosyncrasy.' At the next moment he purrs with complacency at the recollection of having been forced into an avowal of his authorship of an article in the 'Edinburgh Review.' Most generally he eschews these naïve lapses into vanity. He dilates on the old text of the 'shyness of scholars.' The learned are out of place in competition with the world. They are not and ought not to fancy themselves fitted for the vulgar arena. They can never enjoy their old privileges. 'Fool that it (learning) was, ever to forego its privileges and loosen the strong hold it had on opinion in bigotry and superstition!' The same tone of disgust pronounces itself more cynically in an Essay 'On the Pleasure of Hating.' Hatred is, he admits, a poisonous ingredient in all our passions, but it is that which gives reality to them. Patriotism means hatred of the French, and virtue is a hatred of other people's faults to atone for our own vices. All things turn to hatred. 'We hate old friends, we hate old books, we hate old opinions,

and at last we come to hate ourselves.' Summing up all his disappointments, the broken friendships, and disappointed ambitions, and vanished illusions, he asks, in conclusion, whether he has not come to hate and despise himself. 'Indeed, I do,' he answers, 'and chiefly for not having hated and despised the world enough.'

This is an outbreak of temporary spleen. Nobody loved his old books and old opinions better. Hazlitt is speaking in the character of Timon, which indeed fits him rather too easily. But elsewhere the same strain of cynicism comes out in more natural and less extravagant form. Take, for example, the Essay on the 'Conduct of Life.' It is a piece of *bonâ fide* advice addressed to his boy at school, and gives in a sufficiently edifying form the commonplaces which elders are accustomed to address to their juniors. Honesty, independence, diligence, and temperance are commended in good set terms, though with an earnestness which, as is often the case with Hazlitt, imparts some reality to outworn formulæ. When, however, he comes to the question of marriage, the true man breaks out. Don't trust, he says, to fine sentiments: they will make no more impression on these delicate creatures than on a piece of marble. Love in woman is vanity, interest, or fancy. Women care nothing about talents or virtue about poets or philosophers or politicians. They judge by the eye. 'No true woman ever regarded anything but her lover's person and address.' The author has no chance; for he lives in a dream, he feels nothing spontaneously, his metaphysical refinements are all thrown away. 'Look up, laugh loud, talk big, keep the colour in your cheek and the fire in your eye; adorn your person; maintain your health, your beauty, and your animal spirits; or if you once lapse into poetry and philo-

sophy you will want an eye to show you, a hand to guide you, a bosom to love—and will stagger into your grave old before your time, unloved and unlovely.' 'A spider,' he adds, 'the meanest creature that crawls or lives, has its mate or fellow, but a scholar has no mate or fellow.' Mrs. Hazlitt, Miss Sarah Walker, and several other ladies, thought Hazlitt surly, and cared nothing for his treatise on human nature. Therefore (it is true Hazlittian logic) no woman cares for sentiment. The sex which despised him must be despicable. Equally characteristic is his profound belief that his failure in another line is owing to the malignity of the world at large. In one of his most characteristic Essays he asks whether genius is conscious of its powers. He writes what he declares to be a digression about his own experience, and we may believe as much as we please of his assertion that he does not quote himself as an example of genius. He has spoken, he declares, with freedom and power, and will not cease because he is abused for not being a Government tool. He wrote a charming character of Congreve's Millamant, but it was unnoticed because he was not a Government tool. Gifford would not relish his account of Dekkar's Orlando Friscobaldo—because he was not a Government tool. He wrote admirable table-talks—for once, as they are nearly finished, he will venture to praise himself. He could swear (were they not his) that the thoughts in them were 'founded as the rock, free as the air, the hue like an Italian picture.' But, had the style been like polished steel, as firm and as bright, it would have availed him nothing, for he was not a Government tool. The world hated him, we see, for his merits. It is a bad world, he says ; but don't think that it is my vanity which has taken offence, for I am remarkable for modesty, and

therefore I know that my virtues are faults of which I ought to be ashamed. Is this pride or vanity, or humility, or cynicism, or self-reproach for wasted talents, or an intimate blending of passions for which there is no precise name? Who can unravel the masks within masks of a cunning egotism?

To one virtue, however, that of political constancy, Hazlitt lays claim in the most emphatic terms. If he quarrels with all his friends—'most of the friends I have seen have turned out the bitterest enemies, or cold, uncomfortable acquaintance'—it is, of course, their fault. A thoroughgoing egotist must think himself the centre of gravity of the world, and all change of relations must mean that others have moved away from him. Politically, too, all who have given up his opinions are deserters, and generally from the worst of motives. He accuses Burke of turning against the Revolution from—of all motives in the world!—jealousy of Rousseau; a theory still more impossible than Mr. Buckle's hypothesis of madness. Court favour supplies in most cases a simpler explanation of the general demoralisation. Hazlitt could not give credit to men like Southey and Coleridge for sincere alarm at the French Revolution. Such a sentiment would be too unreasonable, for he had not been alarmed himself. His constancy, indeed, would be admirable if it did not suggest doubts of his wisdom. A man whose opinions at fifty are his opinions at fourteen has opinions of very little value. If his intellect has developed properly, or if he has profited by experience, he will modify, though he need not retract, his early views. To claim to have learnt nothing from 1792 to 1830 is almost to write yourself down as hopelessly impenetrable. The explanation is, that what Hazlitt called his opinions were really his feelings. He could argue very in-

geniously, as appears from his remarks on Coleridge and Malthus, but his logic was the slave, not the ruler, of his emotions. His politics were simply the expression, in a generalised form, of his intense feeling of personality. They are a projection upon the modern political world of that heroic spirit of individual self-respect which animated his Puritan forefathers. One question, and only one question, he frequently tells us, is of real importance. All the rest is mere verbiage. The single dogma worth attacking or defending is the divine right of kings. Are men, in the old phrase, born saddled and bridled, and other men ready booted and spurred, or are they not? That is the single shibboleth which distinguishes true men from false. Others, he says, bowed their heads to the image of the beast. 'I spit upon it, and buffeted it, and pointed at it, and drew aside the veil that then half concealed it.' This passionate denial of the absolute right of men over their fellows is but vicarious pride, if you please to call it so, or a generous recognition of the dignity of human nature translated into political terms. Hazlitt's character did not change, however much his judgment of individuals might change; and therefore the principles which merely reflected his character remained rooted and unshaken. And yet his politics changed curiously enough in another sense. The abstract truth, in Hazlitt's mind, must always have a concrete symbol. He chose to regard Napoleon as the antithesis to the divine right of kings. That was the vital formula of Napoleon, his essence, and the true meaning of his policy. The one question in abstract politics was typified for Hazlitt by the contrast between Napoleon and the Holy Alliance. To prove that Napoleon could trample on human rights as roughly as any legitimate sovereign was for him mere waste

of time. Napoleon's tyranny meant a fair war against the evil principle. Had Hazlitt lived in France, and come into collision with press laws, it is likely enough that his sentiments would have changed. But Napoleon was far enough off to serve as a mere poetical symbol ; his memory had got itself entwined in those youthful associations on which Hazlitt always dwelt so fondly ; and, moreover, to defend 'Boney' was to quarrel with most of his countrymen, and even of his own party. What more was wanted to make him one of Hazlitt's superstitions? No more ardent devotee of the Napoleonic legend ever existed, and Hazlitt's last years were employed in writing a book which is a political pamphlet as much as a history. He worships the eldest Napoleon with the fervour of a corporal of the Old Guard, and denounces the great conspiracy of kings and nobles with the energy of Cobbett ; but he had none of the special knowledge which alone could give permanent value to such a performance. He seems to have consulted only the French authorities ; and it is refreshing for once to find an Englishman telling the story of Waterloo entirely from the French side, and speaking, for example, of left and right as if he had been—as in imagination he was—by the side of Napoleon instead of Wellington. Even M. Victor Hugo can see more merit in the English army and its commander. A radical, who takes Napoleon for his polar star, must change some of his theories, though he disguises the change from himself ; but a change of a different kind came over Hazlitt as he grew older.

The enthusiasm of the Southeys and Wordsworths for the French Revolution changed—whatever their motives—into enthusiasm for the established order. Hazlitt's enthusiasm remained, but became the enthusiasm of regret

instead of hope. As one by one the former zealots dropped off he despised them as renegades, and clasped his old creed the more firmly to his bosom. But the change did not draw him nearer to the few who remained faithful. They perversely loved the wrong side of the right cause, or loved it for the wrong reason. He liked the Whigs no better than the Tories ; the 'Edinburgh' and the 'Quarterly' were opposition coaches, making a great dust and spattering each other with mud, but travelling by the same road to the same end. A Whig, he said, was a trimmer who dared neither to be a rogue nor an honest man, but was 'a sort of whiffling, shuffling, cunning, silly, contemptible, unmeaning negation of the two.' And the true genuine radical reformers? To them, as represented by the school of Bentham, Hazlitt entertained an aversion quite as hearty as his aversion for Whigs and Tories. If, he says, the Whigs are too finical to join heartily with the popular advocates, the Reformers are too cold. They hated literature, poetry, and romance ; nothing gives them pleasure that does not give others pain ; utilitarianism means prosaic, hard-hearted, narrow-minded dogmatism. Indeed, his pet Essay on the principles of human nature was simply an assault on what he took to be their fundamental position. He fancied that the school of Bentham regarded man as a purely selfish and calculating animal ; and his whole philosophy was an attempt to prove the natural disinterestedness of man, and to indicate for the imagination and the emotions their proper place beside the calculating faculty. Few were those who did not come under one or other clause of this sweeping denunciation. He assailed Shelley, who was neither Whig, Tory, nor Utilitarian, so cuttingly as to provoke a dispute with Leigh

Hunt, and had some of his sharp criticisms for his friend Godwin. His general moral, indeed, is the old congenial one. The reformer is as unfit for this world as the scholar. He is the only wise man, but, as things go, wisdom is the worst of follies. The reformer, he says, is necessarily a marplot ; he does not know what he would be at ; if he did, he does not much care for it ; and, moreover, he is 'governed habitually by a spirit of contradiction, and is always wise beyond what is practicable.' Upon this text Hazlitt dilates with immense spirit, satirising the crotchety and impracticable race, and contrasting them with the disciplined phalanx of Toryism, brilliantly and bitterly enough to delight Gifford ; and yet he is writing a preface to a volume of radical Essays. He is consoling himself for being in a minority of one by proving that two virtuous men must always disagree. Hazlitt is no genuine democrat. He hates 'both mobs,' or, in other words, the great mass of the human race. He would sympathise with Coriolanus more easily than with the Tribunes. He laughs at the perfectibility of the species, and holds that 'all things move, not in progress, but in a ceaseless round.' The glorious dream is fled :

> The radiance which was once so bright
> Is now for ever taken from our sight ;

and his only consolation is to live over in memory the sanguine times of his youth, before Napoleon had fallen and the Holy Alliance restored the divine right of kings ; to cherish eternal regret for the hopes that have departed, and hatred and scorn equally enduring for those who blasted them. 'Give me back,' he exclaims, 'one single evening at Boxhill, after a stroll in the deep empurpled woods, before Bonaparte was yet beaten, with "wine of Attic taste," when

wit, beauty, friendship presided at the board.' The personal blends with the political regret.

Hazlitt, the politician, was soured. He fed his morbid egotism by indignantly chewing the cud of disappointment, and scornfully rejecting comfort. He quarrelled with his wife and with most of his friends, even with the gentle Lamb, till Lamb regained his affections by the brief quarrel with Southey. Certainly, he might call himself, with some plausibility, 'the king of good haters.' But after all, Hazlitt's cynicism is the souring of a generous nature; and when we turn from the politician to the critic and the essayist, our admiration for his powers is less frequently jarred by annoyance at their wayward misuse. His egotism—for he is still an egotist—here takes a different shape. His criticism is not of the kind which is now most popular. He lived before the days of philosophers who talk about the organism and its environment, and of the connoisseurs who boast of an eclectic taste for all the delicate essences of art. He never thought of showing that a great writer was only the product of his time, race, and climate; and he had not learnt to use such terms of art as 'supreme,' 'gracious,' 'tender,' 'bitter,' and 'subtle,' in which a good deal of criticism now consists. Lamb, says Hazlitt, tried old authors 'on his palate as epicures taste olives;' and the delicacy of discrimination which makes the process enjoyable is perhaps the highest qualification of a good critic. Hazlitt's point of view was rather different, nor can we ascribe to him without qualification that exquisite appreciation of purely literary charm which is so rare and so often affected. Nobody, indeed, loved some authors more heartily or understood them better; his love is so hearty that he cannot preserve the true critical attitude. Instead of trying them

on his palate, he swallows them greedily. His judgment of an author seems to depend upon two circumstances. He is determined in great measure by his private associations, and in part by his sympathy for the character of the writer. His interest in this last sense is, one may say, rather psychological than purely critical. He thinks of an author not as the exponent of a particular vein of thought or emotion, nor as an artistic performer on the instrument of language, but as a human being to be loved or hated, or both, like Napoleon or Gifford or Southey.

Hazlitt's favourite authors were, for the most part, the friends of his youth. He had pored over their pages till he knew them by heart ; their phrases were as familiar to his lips as texts of Scripture to preachers who know but one book ; the places where he had read them became sacred to him, and a glory of his early enthusiasm was still reflected from the old pages. Rousseau was his beloved above all writers. They had a natural affinity. What Hazlitt says of Rousseau may be partly applied to himself. Of Hazlitt it might be said almost as truly as of Rousseau, that 'he had the most intense consciousness of his own existence. No object that had once made an impression upon him was ever after effaced.' In Rousseau's 'Confessions' and 'Nouvelle Héloïse' Hazlitt saw the reflections of his own passions. He spent, he declares, two whole years in reading these two books ; and they were the happiest years of his life. He marks with a white stone the days on which he read particular passages. It was on April 10, 1798—as he tells us some twenty years later—that he sat down to a volume of the 'New Héloïse,' at the inn at Llangollen, over a bottle of sherry and a cold chicken. He tells us which passage he read and what was the view before his bodily

eyes. His first reading of 'Paul and Virginia' is associated with an inn at Bridgwater; and at another old-fashioned inn he tells how the rustic fare and the quaint architecture gave additional piquancy to Congreve's wit. He remembers, too, the spot at which he first read Mrs. Inchbald's 'Simple Story;' how he walked out to escape from one of the tenderest parts, in order to return again with double relish.

'An old crazy hand-organ,' he adds, 'was playing "Robin Adair," a summer shower dropped manna on my head, and slaked my feverish thirst of happiness.' He looks back to his first familiarity with his favourites as an old man may think of his honeymoon. The memories of his own feelings, of his author's poetry, and of the surrounding scenery, are inextricably fused together. The sight of an old volume, he says, sometimes shakes twenty years off his life; he sees his old friends alive again, the place where he read the book, the day when he got it, the feeling of the air, the fields, the sky. To these old favourites he remained faithful, except that he seems to have tired of the glitter of Junius. Burke's politics gave him some severe twinges. He says, in one place, that he always tests the sense and candour of a Liberal by his willingness to admit the greatness of Burke. He adds, as a note to the Essay in which this occurs, that it was written in a 'fit of extravagant candour,' when he thought that he could be more than just to an enemy without betraying a cause. He oscillates between these views as his humour changes. He is absurdly unjust to Burke the politician; but he does not waver in his just recognition of the marvellous power of the greatest—I should almost say the only great—political writer in the language. The first time he read a passage from Burke, he said, This is true eloquence. Johnson immediately became

shelved, and Junius 'shrunk up into little antithetic points and well-tuned sentences. But Burke's style was forked and playful like the lightning, crested like the serpent.' He is never weary of Burke, as he elsewhere says; and, in fact, he is man enough to recognise genuine power when he meets it. To another great master he yields with a reluctance which is an involuntary compliment. The one author whom he admitted into his Pantheon after his youthful enthusiasm had cooled was unluckily the most consistent of Tories. Who is there, he asks, that admires the author of 'Waverley' more than I do? Who is there that despises Sir Walter Scott more? The Scotch novels, as they were then called, fairly overpowered him. The imaginative force, the geniality and the wealth of picturesque incident of the greatest of novelists, disarmed his antipathy. It is curious to see how he struggles with himself. He blesses and curses in a breath. He applies to Scott Pope's description of Bacon, 'the greatest, wisest, meanest of mankind,' and asks—

> Who would not laugh if such a man there be?
> Who would not weep if 'Waverley' were he?

He crowns a torrent of abuse by declaring that Scott has encouraged the lowest panders of a venal press, 'deluging and nauseating the public mind with the offal and garbage of Billingsgate abuse and vulgar slang;' and presently he calls Scott—by way, it is true, of lowering Byron—'one of the greatest teachers of morality that ever lived.' He invents a theory, to which he returns more than once, to justify the contrast. Scott, he says, is much such a writer as the Duke of Wellington (the hated antithesis of Napoleon, whose 'foolish face' he specially detests) is a general. The one gets 100,000 men together, and 'leaves it to them to

fight out the battle, for if he meddled with it he might spoil sport; the other gets an innumerable quantity of facts together, and lets them tell their story as they may. The facts are stubborn in the last instance as the men are in the first, and in neither case is the broth spoiled by the cook.' Both heroes show modesty and self-knowledge, but 'little boldness or inventiveness of genius.' On the strength of this doctrine he even compares Scott disadvantageously with Godwin and Mrs. Inchbald, who had, it seems, more invention though fewer facts. Hazlitt was not bound to understand strategy, and devoutly held that Wellington's armies succeeded because their general only looked on. But he should have understood his own trade a little better. Putting aside this grotesque theory, he feels Scott's greatness truly, and admits it generously. He enjoys the broth, to use his own phrase, though he is determined to believe that it somehow made itself.

Lamb said that Hazlitt was a greater authority when he praised than when he abused, a doctrine which may be true of others than Hazlitt. The true distinction is rather that Hazlitt, though always unsafe as a judge, is admirable as an advocate in his own cause, and poor when merely speaking from his brief. Of Mrs. Inchbald I must say what Hazlitt shocked his audience by saying of Hannah More; that she has written a good deal which I have not read, and I therefore cannot deny that her novels might have been written by Venus; but I cannot admit that Wycherley's brutal 'Plain-dealer' is as good as ten volumes of sermons. 'It is curious to see,' says Hazlitt, rather naïvely, 'how the same subject is treated by two such different authors as Shakespeare and Wycherley.' Macaulay's remark about the same coincidence is more to the point. 'Wycherley borrows

Viola,' says that vigorous moralist, 'and Viola forthwith becomes a pander of the basest sort.' That is literally true. Indeed, Hazlitt's love for the dramatists of the Restoration is something of a puzzle, except so far as it is explained by early associations. Even then it is hard to explain the sympathy which Hazlitt, the lover of Rousseau and sentiment, feels for Congreve, whose speciality it is that a touch of sentiment is as rare in his painfully-witty dialogues as a drop of water in the desert. Perhaps a contempt for the prejudices of respectable people gave zest to Hazlitt's enjoyment of a literature, representative of a social atmosphere, most propitious to his best feelings. And yet, though I cannot take Hazlitt's judgment, I would frankly admit that Hazlitt's enthusiasm brings out Congreve's real merits with a force of which a calmer judge would be incapable. His warm praises of 'The Beggar's Opera,' his assault upon Sidney's 'Arcadia,' his sarcasms against Tom Moore, are all excellent in their way, whether we do or do not agree with his final result. Whenever Hazlitt writes from his own mind, in short, he writes what is well worth reading. Hazlitt learnt something in his later years from Lamb. He prefers, he says, those papers of Elia in which there is the least infusion of antiquated language; and, in fact, Lamb never inoculated him with his taste for the old English literature. Hazlitt gave a series of lectures upon the Elizabethan dramatists, and carelessly remarks some time afterwards that he has only read about a quarter of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, and intends to read the rest when he has a chance. It is plain, indeed, that the lectures, though written at times with great spirit, are the work of a man who has got them up for the occasion. And in his more ambitious and successful Essays

upon Shakespeare the same want of reading appears in another way. He is more familiar with Shakespeare's text than many better scholars. His familiarity is proved by a habit of quotation of which it has been disputed whether it is a merit or a defect. What phrenologists would call the adhesiveness of Hazlitt's mind, its extreme retentiveness for any impression which has once been received, tempts him to a constant repetition of familiar phrases and illustrations. He has, too, a trick of working in patches of his old Essays, which he expressly defends on the ground that a book which has not reached a second edition may be considered by its author as manuscript. This self-plagiarism sometimes worries us, as we are worried by a man whose conversation runs in ruts. But his quotations from other authors, where used in moderation, often give a pleasant richness to his style. Shakespeare, in particular, seems to be a storehouse into which he can always dip for an appropriate turn of phrase, and his love of Shakespeare is of a characteristic kind. He has not counted syllables nor weighed various readings. He does not throw a new light upon delicate indications of thought and sentiment, nor philosophise after the manner of Coleridge and the Germans, nor regard Shakespeare as the representative of his age according to the sweeping method of M. Taine. Neither does he seem to love Shakespeare himself as he loves Rousseau or Richardson. He speaks contemptuously of the Sonnets and Poems, and, though I respect his sincerity, I think that such a verdict necessarily indicates indifference to the most Shakespearian parts of Shakespeare. The calm assertion that the qualities of the Poems are the reverse of the qualities of the Plays is unworthy of Hazlitt's general acuteness. That which really attracts Hazlitt is sufficiently

indicated by the title of his book ; he describes the characters of Shakespeare's plays. It is Iago, and Timon, and Coriolanus, and Antony, and Cleopatra, who really interest him. He loves and hates them as if they were his own contemporaries ; he gives the main outlines of their character with a spirited touch. And yet one somehow feels that Hazlitt is not at his best in Shakespearian criticism ; his eulogies savour of commonplace, and are wanting in spontaneity. There is not that warm glow of personal feeling which gives light and warmth to his style whenever he touches upon his early favourites. Perhaps he is a little daunted by the greatness of his task, and perhaps there is something in the Shakespearian width of sympathy and in the Shakespearian humour which lies beyond Hazlitt's sphere. His criticism of Hamlet is feeble ; he does not do justice to Mercutio or to Jaques ; but he sympathises more heartily with the tremendous passion of Lear and Othello, and finds something congenial to his taste in Coriolanus and Timon of Athens. It is characteristic, too, that he evidently understands Shakespeare better on the stage than in the closet. When he can associate Iago and Shylock with the visible presence of Kean, he can introduce that personal element which is so necessary to his best writing.

The best, indeed, of Hazlitt's criticisms—if the word may be so far extended—are his criticisms of living men. The criticism of contemporary portraits called the 'Spirit of the Age' is one of the first of those series which have now become popular, as it is certainly one of the very best. The descriptions of Bentham, and Godwin, and Coleridge, and Horne Tooke are masterpieces in their way. They are, of course, unfair ; but that is part of their charm. One would no more take for granted Hazlitt's valuation of

Wordsworth than Timon's judgment of Alcibiades. Hazlitt sees through coloured glasses, but his vision is not the less penetrating. The vulgar satirist is such a one as Hazlitt somewhere mentioned who called Wordsworth a dunce. Hazlitt was quite incapable of such a solecism. He knew, nobody better, that a telling caricature must be a good likeness. If he darkens the shades, and here and there exaggerates an ungainly feature, we still know that the shade exists and that the feature is not symmetrical. De Quincey reports the saying of some admiring friend of Hazlitt, who confessed to a shudder whenever Hazlitt used his habitual gesture of placing his hand within his waistcoat. The hand might emerge armed with a dagger. Whenever, said the same friend (Heaven preserve us from our friends !), Hazlitt had been distracted for a moment from the general conversation, he looked round with a mingled air of suspicion and defiance, as though some objectionable phrase might have evaded his censure in the interval. The traits recur to us when we read Hazlitt's descriptions of the men he had known. We seem to see the dark sardonic man, watching the faces and gestures of his friends, ready to take sudden offence at any affront to his cherished prejudices, and yet hampered by a kind of nervous timidity which makes him unpleasantly conscious of his own awkwardness. He remains silent, till somebody unwittingly contradicts his unspoken thoughts—the most irritating kind of contradiction to some people !—and perhaps heaps indiscriminating praise on an old friend, a term nearly synonymous with an old enemy. Then the dagger suddenly flashes out, and Hazlitt strikes two or three rapid blows, aimed with unerring accuracy at the weak points of the armour which he knows so well. And then, as he strikes, a relenting comes over him ;

he remembers old days with a sudden gush of fondness, and puts in a touch of scorn for his allies or himself. Coleridge may deserve a blow, but the applause of Coleridge's enemies awakes his self-reproach. His invective turns into panegyric, and he warms for a time into hearty admiration, which proves that his irritation arises from an excess, not from a defect, of sensibility; but finding that he has gone a little too far, he lets his praise slide into equivocal description, and, with some parting epigram, he relapses into silence. The portraits thus drawn are never wanting in piquancy nor in fidelity. Brooding over his injuries and his desertions, Hazlitt has pondered almost with the eagerness of a lover upon the qualities of his intimates. Suspicion, unjust it may be, has given keenness to his investigation. He has interpreted in his own fashion every mood and gesture. He has watched his friends as a courtier watches a royal favourite. He has stored in his memory, as we fancy, the good retorts which his shyness or unreadiness smothered at the propitious moment, and brings them out in the shape of a personal description. When such a man sits at our table, silent and apparently self absorbed, and yet shrewd and sensitive, we may well be afraid of the dagger, though it may not be drawn till after our death, and may write memoirs instead of piercing flesh. And yet Hazlitt is no mean assassin of reputations; nor is his enmity as a rule more than the seamy side of friendship. Gifford, indeed, and Croker, 'the talking potato,' are treated as outside the pale of human rights.

Excellent as Hazlitt can be as a dispenser of praise and blame, he seems to me to be at his best in a different capacity. The first of his performances which attracted much attention was the Round Table, designed by Leigh

Hunt (who contributed a few papers), on the old 'Spectator' model. In the essays afterwards collected in the volumes called 'Table Talk' and the 'Plain Speaker,' he is still better, because more certain of his position. It would, indeed, be difficult to name any writer, from the days of Addison to those of Lamb, who has equalled Hazlitt's best performances of this kind. Addison is too unlike to justify a comparison; and, to say the truth, though he has rather more in common with Lamb, the contrast is much more obvious than the resemblance. Each wants the other's most characteristic vein; Hazlitt has hardly a touch of humour, and Lamb is incapable of Hazlitt's caustic scorn for the world and himself. They have indeed in common, besides certain superficial tastes, a love of pathetic brooding over the past. But the sentiment exerted is radically different. Lamb forgets himself when brooding over an old author or summing up the 'old familiar faces.' His melancholy and his mirth cast delightful cross-lights upon the topics of which he converses, and we do not know, until we pause to reflect, that it is not the intrinsic merit of the objects, but Lamb's own character, which has caused our pleasure. They would be dull, that is, in other hands; but the feeling is embodied in the object described, and not made itself the source of our interest. With Hazlitt it is the opposite. He is never more present than when he is dwelling upon the past. Even in criticising a book or a man, his favourite mode is to tell us how he came to love or to hate him; and in the non-critical Essays he is always appealing to us, directly or indirectly, for sympathy with his own personal emotions. He tells us how passionately he is yearning for the days of his youth; he is trying to escape from his pressing annoyances; wrapping himself in

sacred associations against the fret and worry of surrounding cares; repaying himself for the scorn of women or 'Quarterly' Reviewers by retreating into some imaginary hermitage; and it is the delight of dreaming upon which he dwells more than upon the beauty of the visions revealed to his inward eye. The force with which this sentiment is presented gives a curious fascination to some of his essays. Take, for example, the essay in 'Table Talk,' 'On Living to One's self,'—an essay written, as he is careful to tell us, on a mild January day in the country, whilst the fire is blazing on the hearth and a partridge getting ready for his supper. There he expatiates in happy isolation on the enjoyments of living as 'a silent spectator of the mighty scheme of things;' as being in the world, and not of it; watching the clouds and the stars, poring over a book, or gazing at a picture without a thought of becoming an author or an artist. He has drifted into a quiet little backwater, and congratulates himself in all sincerity on his escape from the turbulent stream outside. He drinks in the delight of rest at every pore; reduces himself for the time to the state of a polyp drifting on the warm ocean stream, and becomes a voluptuous hermit. He calls up the old days when he acted up to his principles, and found pleasure enough in endless meditation and quiet observation of nature. He preaches most edifyingly on the disappointments, the excitements, the rough impacts of hard facts upon sensitive natures, which haunt the world outside, and declares, in all sincerity, 'this sort of dreaming existence is the best; he who quits it to go in search of realities generally barters repose for repeated disappointments and vain regrets.' He is sincere, and therefore eloquent; and we need not, unless we please, add the remark that he

enjoys rest because it is a relief from toil; and that he will curse the country as heartily as any man if doomed to entire rest. This meditation on the phenomena of his own sensations leads him often into interesting reflections of a psychological kind. He analyses his own feelings with constant eagerness, as he analyses the character of his enemies. A good specimen is the essay 'On Antiquity' in the 'Plain Speaker,' which begins with some striking remarks on the apparently arbitrary mode in which some objects and periods seem older to us than others, in defiance of chronology. The monuments of the Middle Ages seem more antique than the Greek statues and temples with their immortal youth. 'It is not the full-grown, articulated, thoroughly accomplished periods of the world that we regard with the pity or reverence due to age, so much as those imperfect, unformed, uncertain periods which seem to totter on the verge of non-existence, to shrink from the grasp of our feeble imagination, as they crawl out of, or retire into the womb of time, of which our utmost assurance is to doubt whether they ever were or not.' And then, as usual, he passes to his own experience, and meditates on the changed aspect of the world in youth and maturer life. The petty, personal emotions pass away, whilst the grand and ideal 'remains with us unimpaired in its lofty abstraction from age to age.' Therefore, though the inference is not quite clear, he can never forget the first time he saw Mrs. Siddons act, or the appearance of Burke's 'Letter to a Noble Lord.' And then, in a passage worthy of Sir Thomas Browne, he describes the change produced as our minds are stereotyped, as our most striking thoughts become truisms, and we lose the faculty of admiration. In our

youth 'art woos us ; science tempts us with her intricate labyrinths ; each step presents unlooked-for vistas, and closes upon us our backward path. Our onward road is strange, obscure, and infinite. We are bewildered in a shadow, lost in a dream. Our perceptions have the brightness and indistinctness of a trance. Our continuity of consciousness is broken, crumbles, and falls to pieces. We go on learning and forgetting every hour. Our feelings are chaotic, confused, strange to each other and ourselves.' But in time we learn by rote the lessons which we had to spell out in our youth. 'A very short period (from 15 to 25 or 30) includes the whole map and table of contents of human life. From that time we may be said to live our lives over again, repeat ourselves—the same thoughts return at stated intervals, like the tunes of a barrel-organ ; and the volume of the universe is no more than a form of words, a book of reference.'

From such musings Hazlitt can turn to describe any fresh impression which has interested him, in spite of his occasional weariness, with a freshness and vivacity which prove that his eye had not grown dim, nor his temperament incapable of enjoyment. He fell in love with Miss Sarah Walker at the tolerably ripe age of forty-three ; and his desire to live in the past is not to be taken more seriously than his contempt for his literary reputation. It lasts only till some vivid sensation occurs in the present. In congenial company he could take a lively share in conversation, as is proved not only by external evidence, but by his very amusing book of conversations with Northcote - an old cynic out of whom it does not seem that anybody else could strike many sparks,—or from the essay, partly historical, it is to

be supposed, in which he records his celebrated discussion with Lamb, on persons whom one would wish to have seen. But perhaps some of his most characteristic performances in this line are those in which he anticipates the modern taste for muscularity. His wayward disposition to depreciate ostensibly his own department of action leads him to write upon the 'disadvantages of intellectual superiority,' and to maintain the thesis that the glory of the Indian jugglers is more desirable than that of a statesman. And perhaps the same sentiment, mingled with sheer artistic love of the physically beautiful, prompts his eloquence upon the game of fives – in which he praises the great player Cavanagh as warmly, and describes his last moments as pathetically, as if he were talking of Rousseau – and still more his immortal essay on the fight between the Gasman and Bill Neate. Prize-fighting is fortunately fallen into hopeless decay, and we are pretty well ashamed of the last flicker of enthusiasm created by Sayers and Heenan. We may therefore enjoy without remorse the prose-poem in which Hazlitt kindles with genuine enthusiasm to describe the fearful glories of the great battle. Even to one who hates the most brutalising of amusements the spirit of the writer is impressibly contagious. We condemn, but we applaud; we are half disposed for the moment to talk the old twaddle about British pluck; and when Hazlitt's companion on his way home pulls out of his pocket a volume of the 'Nouvelle Héloïse,' admit for a moment that 'Love of the Fancy is,' as the historian assures us, 'compatible with a cultivation of sentiment.' If Hazlitt had thrown as much into his description of the Battle of Waterloo, and had taken the English side, he would have been a popular writer. But even

Hazlitt cannot quite embalm the memories of Cribb, Belcher, and Gully.

It is time, however, to stop. More might be said by a qualified writer of Hazlitt's merits as a judge of pictures or of the stage. The same literary qualities mark all his writings. De Quincey, of course, condemns Hazlitt, as he does Lamb, for a want of 'continuity.' 'No man can be eloquent,' he says, 'whose thoughts are abrupt, insulated, capricious, and nonsequacious.' But then De Quincey will hardly allow that any man is eloquent except Jeremy Taylor, Sir Thomas Browne, and Thomas De Quincey. Hazlitt certainly does not belong to their school; nor, on the other hand, has he the plain homespun force of Swift and Cobbett. And yet readers who do not insist upon measuring all prose by the same standard, will probably agree that if Hazlitt is not a great rhetorician, if he aims at no gorgeous effects of complex harmony, he has yet an eloquence of his own. It is indeed an eloquence which does not imply quick sympathy with many moods of feeling, or an intellectual vision at once penetrating and comprehensive. It is the eloquence characteristic of a proud and sensitive nature, which expresses a very keen if narrow range of feeling, and implies a powerful grasp of one, if only one side of the truth. Hazlitt harps a good deal upon one string; but that string vibrates forcibly. His best passages are generally an accumulation of short, pithy sentences, shaped in strong feeling, and coloured by picturesque association; but repeating, rather than corroborating, each other. The last blow goes home, but each falls on the same place. He varies the phrase more than the thought; and sometimes he becomes obscure, because he is so absorbed in his own feelings that he forgets the very existence of strangers

who require explanation. Read through Hazlitt, and this monotony becomes a little tiresome ; but dip into him at intervals, and you will often be astonished that so vigorous a writer has not left some more enduring monument of his remarkable powers.

DISRAELI'S NOVELS[1]

It is a commonplace with men of literary eminence to extol the man of deeds above the man of words. Scott was half ashamed of scribbling novels whilst Wellington was winning battles; and, if Carlyle be a true prophet, the most brilliant writer is scarcely worthy to unloose the shoe's latchet of the silent heroes of action. Perhaps it is graceful in masters of the art to depreciate their own peculiar function. People who have less personal interest in the matter need not be so modest. I will confess, at any rate, to preferring the men who have sown some new seed of thought above the heroes whose names mark epochs in history. I would rather make the nation's ballads than give its laws, dictate principles than carry them into execution, and leaven a country with new ideas than translate them into facts, inevitably mangling and distorting them in the process. And therefore I would rather have written 'Hamlet' than defeated the Spanish Armada; or 'Paradise Lost,' than have turned out the Long Parliament; or 'Gray's Elegy,' than have stormed the heights of Abram; or the Waverley Novels, than have won Waterloo or even Trafalgar. I would rather have been Voltaire or Goethe than Frederick or

[1] Perhaps I ought to substitute 'Lord Beaconsfield' for Disraeli; but I am writing of the author of 'Coningsby,' rather than of the author of 'Endymion:' and I will therefore venture to preserve the older name.

Napoleon ; and I suspect that when the poor historian of the nineteenth century begins his superhuman work, he will, as a thorough philosopher, attribute more importance to two or three recent English writers than to all the English statesmen who have been strutting and fretting their little hour at Westminster. And therefore, too, I wish that Disraeli could have stuck to his novels instead of rising to be Prime Minister of England. This opinion is, of course, entirely independent of any judgment which may be passed upon Disraeli's political career. Granting that his cause has always been the right one, granting that he has rendered it essential services, I should still wish that his brilliant literary ability had been allowed to ripen undisturbed by all the worries and distractions of parliamentary existence. Persons who think the creation of a majority in the House of Commons a worthy reward for the labours of a lifetime will, of course, differ from this conclusion. Disraeli, at any rate, ought to have agreed. No satirist has ever struck off happier portraits of the ordinary British legislator, or been more alive to the stupefying influences of a parliamentary career. We have gone through a peaceful revolution since Disraeli first sketched Rigby and Taper and Tadpole from the life ; but the influences which they embodied are still as powerful, and a parliamentary atmosphere as little propitious to the pure intellect, as ever. Coningsby, if he still survives, must have lost many illusions ; he must have herded with the Tapers and Tadpoles, and prompted Rigby to write slashing articles on his behalf in the quarterlies. He must have felt that his intellect was cruelly wasted in talking claptrap and platitude to suit the thick comprehensions of his party ; and the huge dead weight of the invincible impenetrability to ideas of ordinary mankind must

have lain heavy upon his soul. How many Tadpoles, one would like to know, still haunt the Carlton Club, or throng the ministerial benches, and how many Rigbys have forced their way into the Cabinet? That is one of the state secrets which will hardly be divulged by the only competent observer. But at any rate it is sad that the critic, who applied the lash so skilfully, should have been so unequally yoked with the objects of his contempt. Disraeli's talents for entertaining fiction may not indeed have been altogether wasted in his official career; but he at least may pardon admirers of his writing who regret that he should have squandered powers of imagination, capable of true creative work, upon that alternation of truckling and blustering which is called governing the country.

The qualities which are of rather equivocal value in a minister of state may be admirable in the domain of literature. It is hardly desirable that the followers of a political leader should be haunted by an ever-recurring doubt as to whether his philosophical utterances express deep convictions or the extemporised combinations of a fertile fancy, and be uncertain whether he is really putting their clumsy thoughts into clearer phrases, or foisting showy nonsense upon them for his own purposes, or simply laughing at them in his sleeve. But, in a purely literary sense, this ambiguous hovering between two meanings, this oscillation between the ironical and the serious, is always amusing, and sometimes delightful. Some simple-minded people are revolted, even in literature, by the ironical method; and tell the humorist, with an air of moral disapproval, that they never know whether he is in jest or in earnest. To such matter-of-fact persons Disraeli's novels must be a standing offence; for it is his most characteristic peculiarity that

the passage from one phase to the other is imperceptible. He has moments of obvious seriousness ; at frequent intervals comes a flash of downright sarcasm, as unmistakable in its meaning as the cut of a whip across your face ; and elsewhere we have passages which aim unmistakably, and sometimes with unmistakable success, at rhetorical excellence. But, between the two, there is a wide field where we may interpret his meaning as we please. The philosophical theory may imply a genuine belief, or may be a mere bit of conventional filling in, or perhaps a parody of his friends or himself. The gorgeous passages may be intentionally over-coloured, or may really represent his most sincere taste. His homage may be genuine or a biting mockery. His extravagances are kept precisely at such a pitch that it is equally fair to argue that a satirist must have meant them to be absurd, or to argue only that he would have seen their absurdity in anybody else. The unfortunate critic feels himself in a position analogous to that of the suitors in the 'Merchant of Venice.' He may blunder grievously, whatever alternative he selects. If he pronounces a passage to be pure gold, it may turn out to be merely the mask of a bitter sneer ; or he may declare it to be ingenious burlesque when put forward in the most serious earnest ; or may ridicule it as overstrained bombast, and find that it was never meant to be anything else. It is wiser to admit that perhaps the author was not very clear himself, or possibly enjoyed that ambiguous attitude which might be interpreted according to the taste of his readers and the development of events. A man who deals in oracular utterances acquires instinctively a mode of speech which may shift its colour with every change of light. The texture of Disraeli's writings is so ingeniously shot with

irony and serious sentiment that each tint may predominate by turns. It is impossible to suppose that the weaver of so cunning a web should never have intended the effects which he produces ; but frequently, too, they must be the spontaneous and partly unconscious results of a peculiar intellectual temperament. Delight in blending the pathetic with the ludicrous is the characteristic of the true humorist. Disraeli is not exactly a humorist, but something for which the rough nomenclature of critics has not yet provided a distinctive name. His pathos is not sufficiently tender nor his laughter quite genial enough. The quality which results is homologous to, though not identical with, genuine humour: for the smile we must substitute a sneer, and the element which enters into combination with the satire is something more distantly allied to poetical unction than to glittering rhetoric. The Disraelian irony thus compounded is hitherto a unique product of intellectual chemistry.

Most of Disraeli's novels are intended to set forth what, for want of a better name, must be called a religious or political creed. To grasp its precise meaning, or to determine the precise amount of earnestness with which it is set forth, is of course hopeless. Its essence is to be mysterious, and half the preacher's delight is in tantalising his disciples. At moments he cannot quite suppress the amusement with which he mocks their hopeless bewilderment. When Coningsby is on the point of entering public life he reads a speech of one of the initiated, 'denouncing the Venetian constitution, to the amazement of several thousand persons, apparently not a little terrified by this unknown danger, now first introduced to their notice.' What more amusing than suddenly to reveal to good easy

citizens that what they took for wholesome food is deadly poison, and to watch their hopeless incapacity to understand whether you are really announcing a truth or launching an epigram!

Disraeli, undoubtedly, has certain fixed beliefs which underlie and which, indeed, explain the superficial versatility of his teaching. Amongst the various doctrines with which he plays more or less seriously, two at least are deeply rooted in his mind. He holds, with a fervour in every way honourable, a belief in the marvellous endowments of his race, and connected with this belief is an almost romantic admiration for every manifestation of intellectual power. Vivian Grey, in a bit of characteristic bombast, describes himself as 'one who has worshipped the empire of the intellect;' and his career is simply an attempt to act out the principle that the world belongs of right to the cleverest. Of Sidonia, after every superlative in the language has been lavished upon his marvellous acquirements, we are told that 'the only human quality that interested him was intellect.' Intellect is equally, if not quite as exclusively, interesting to the creator of Sidonia. He admires it in all its forms—in a Jesuit or a leader of the International, in a charlatan or a statesman, or perhaps even more in one who combines the two characters; but the most interesting of all objects to Disraeli, if one may judge from his books, is a precocious youth, whose delight in the sudden consciousness of great abilities has not yet been dashed by experience. In some other writers we may learn the age of the author by the age of his hero. A novelist who adopts the common practice of painting from himself naturally finds out the merits of middle age in his later works. But in every one of Disraeli's works, from 'Vivian Grey' to 'Lothair,' the

central figure is a youth, who is frequently a statesman at school, and astonishes the world before he has reached his majority. The change in the author's position is, indeed, equally marked in a different way. The youthful heroes of Disraeli's early novels are creative; in his later they become chiefly receptive. Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming show their genius by insubordination; Coningsby and Tancred learn wisdom by sitting at the feet of Sidonia; and Lothair reduces himself so completely to a mere 'passive bucket' to be pumped into by every variety of teacher, that he is unpleasantly like a fool. Disraeli still loves ingenuous youth; but he has gained quite a new perception of the value of docility. Here and there, of course, there is a gentle gibe at juvenile vanity. 'My opinions are already formed on every subject,' says Lothair; 'that is, on every subject of importance; and, what is more, they will never change.' But such vanity has nothing offensive. The audacity with which a lad of twenty solves all the problems of the universe, excites in Disraeli genuine and really generous sympathy. Sidonia converts the sentiment into a theory. Experience, he says, is less than nothing to a creative mind. 'Almost everything that is great has been done by youth.' The greatest captains, the greatest poets, artists, statesmen, and religious reformers of the world, have done their best work by middle life. All theories upon all subjects can be proved from history; and the great Sidonia is not to be pinned down by too literal an interpretation. But at least he is expressing Disraeli's admiration for intellect which has the fervour, rapidity, and reckless audacity of youth, which trusts its intuitions instead of its calculations, and takes its crudest guesses for flashes of inspiration. The exuberant buoyancy of his youthful

heroes gives a certain contagious charm to Disraeli's pages, which is attractive even when verging upon extravagance. Our popular novelists have learned to associate high spirits with muscularity; their youthful heroes are either athletes destined to put on flesh in later days, or premature prigs with serious convictions and a tendency to sermons and blue-books. After a course of such books, Disraeli's genuine love of talent is refreshing. He dwells fondly upon the effervescence of genius which drives men to kick over the traces of respectability and strike out short cuts to fame. If at bottom his heroes are rather eccentric than original, they have at least a righteous hatred of all bores and Philistines, and despise orthodoxy, political economy, and sound information generally. They can provide you with new theories of politics and history, as easily as Mercutio could pour out a string of similes; and we have scarcely the heart to ask whether this vivacious ebullition implies the process of fermentation by which a powerful mind clears its crude ideas, or only an imitation of the process by which superlative cleverness apes true genius. Intellect, as it becomes sobered by middle age and by scholastic training, is no longer so charming. When its guesses ossify into fixed opinions, and its arrogance takes the airs of scientific dogmatism, it is always a tiresome and may be a dangerous quality. Some indication of what Disraeli means by intellect may be found in the preface to 'Lothair.' Speaking of the conflict between science and the old religions, he says that it is a most flagrant fallacy to suppose that modern ages have a monopoly of scientific discovery. The greatest discoveries are not those of modern ages. 'No one for a moment can pretend that printing is so great a discovery as writing, or algebra, or language.

What are the most brilliant of our chemical discoveries compared with the invention of fire and the metals?' Hipparchus ranks with the Keplers and Newtons; and Copernicus was but the champion of Pythagoras. To say nothing of the characteristic assumption that somebody 'discovered' language and fire in the same sense as modern chemists discovered spectrum analysis, the argument is substantially that, because Hipparchus was as great a genius as Newton, the views of the ancients upon religious or historical questions deserve just as much respect as those of the moderns. In other words, the accumulated knowledge of ages has taught us nothing. 'What is conveniently called progress' is merely a polite name for change; and one clever man's guess is as good as another, whatever the period at which he lived. This theory is the correlative of Sidonia's assertion, that experience is useless to the man of genius. The experience of the race is just as valueless. Modern criticism is nothing but an intellectual revolt of the Teutonic races against the Semitic revelation, as the French revolution was a political revolt of the Celtic races. The disturbance will pass away; and we shall find that Abraham and Moses knew more about the universe than Hegel or Comte. The prophets of the sacred race were divinely endowed with an esoteric knowledge concealed from the vulgar behind mystic symbols and ceremonies. If the old oracles are dumb, some gleams of the same power still remain, and in the language of mere mortals are called genius. We find it in perfection only amongst the Semites, whose finer organisation, indicated by their musical supremacy, enables them to catch the still small voice inaudible to our grosser ears. The Aryans, indeed, have some touches of a cognate power, but it is dulled by a more sensuous

temperament. They can enter the court of the Gentiles ; but their moral vesture is too muddy for admission into the holy of holies. If ever they catch a glimpse of the truth, it is in their brilliant youth, when, still uncorrupted by worldly politics, they can induce some Sidonia partly to draw aside the veil.

The intellect, then, as Disraeli conceives it, is not the faculty denounced by theologians, which delights in systematic logical inquiry, and hopes to attain truth by the unrestricted conflict of innumerable minds. It is an abnormal power of piercing mysteries granted only to a few distinguished seers. It does not lead to an earthly science, expressible in definite formulas, and capable of being taught in Sunday schools. The knowledge cannot be fully communicated to the profane, and is at most to be shadowed forth in dim oracular utterances. Disraeli's instinctive affinity for some kind of mystic teaching is indicated by Vivian Grey's first request to his father. 'I wish,' he exclaims, 'to make myself master of the latter Platonists. I want Plotinus and Porphyry, and Iamblichus, and Syrianus, and Mosanius Tyrius, and Pericles, and Hierocles, and Sallustius, and Damasenis !' But Vivian Grey, as we know, wanted also to conquer the Marquis of Carabas ; and the odd combination between a mystic philosopher and a mere political charlatan displays Disraeli's peculiar irony. Intellect with him is a double-edged weapon : it is at once the faculty which reads the dark riddle of the universe, and the faculty which makes use of Tapers and Tadpoles. Our modern Daniel is also a shrewd electioneering agent. Cynics, indeed, have learned in these later days to regard mystery as too often synonymous with nonsense. The difficulty of interpreting esoteric doctrines to the vulgar

generally consists in this that the doctrines are mere collections of big words which collapse, instead of becoming lucid, when put into plain English. The mystagogue is but too closely allied to the charlatan. He may be straining to utter some secret too deep for human utterance, or he is looking wise to conceal absolute vacuity of thought. And at other times he must surely be laughing at the youthful audacity which fancies that speculation is to be carried on by a series of sudden inspirations, instead of laborious accumulation of rigorously-tested reasonings.

The three novels, 'Coningsby,' 'Sybil,' and 'Tancred,' published from 1844 to 1847, form, as their author has told us, a trilogy intended to set forth his views of political, social, and religious problems. Each of them exhibits, in one form or other, this peculiar train of thought. 'Coningsby,' if I am not mistaken, is by far the ablest, and probably owes its pre-eminence to the simple fact that it deals with the topics in which its author felt the keenest interest. The social speculations of 'Sybil' savour too much of the politician getting up a telling case; and the religious speculations of 'Tancred' are pushed to the extreme verge of the grotesque. But 'Coningsby' wants little but a greater absence of purpose to be a first-rate novel. If Disraeli had confined himself to the merely artistic point of view, he might have drawn a picture of political society worthy of comparison with 'Vanity Fair.' Lord Monmouth is evidently related to the Marquis of Steyne; and Rigby is a masterpiece, though perhaps rather too suggestive of a direct study from nature. Lord Monmouth is the ideal type of the 'Venetian' aristocracy; and Rigby, like his historical namesake, of the corrupt wire-pullers who flourished under their shade. The consistent Epicureanism of

the noble, in whom a sense of duty is only represented by a vague instinct that he ought to preserve his political influence as part of his personal splendour, and as an insurance against possible incendiarism, is admirably contrasted by the coarser selfishness of Rigby, who relieves his patron of all dirty work on consideration of feathering his own nest, and fancying himself to be a statesman. The whole background, in short, is painted with inimitable spirit and fidelity. The one decided failure amongst the subsidiary characters is Lucian Grey, the professional parasite, who earns his dinners by his witty buffoonery. Somehow, his fun is terribly dreary on paper; perhaps because, as a parasite, he is not allowed to indulge in the cutting irony which animates all Disraeli's best sayings. The simple buffoonery of exuberant animal spirits is not in Disraeli's line. When he can neither be bitter nor rhetorical, he is apt to drop into mere mechanical flatness. But nobody has described more vigorously all the meaner forms of selfishness, stupidity, and sycophancy engendered under 'that fatal drollery,' as Tancred describes it, 'called a parliamentary government.' The pompous dulness which affects philosophical gravity, the appetite for the mere dry husks and bran of musty constitutional platitude which takes the airs of political wisdom, the pettifogging cunning which supposes the gossips of lobbies and smoking-rooms to be the embodiment of statesmanship, the selfishness which degrades political warfare into a branch of stock-jobbing, and takes a great principle to be useful in suggesting electioneering cries, as Telford thought that navigable rivers were created to feed canals,—these and other tendencies favoured by party government are hit off to the life. 'The man they called Dizzy' can despise a 'miserable

creature, having the honour to be as heartily as Carlyle himself, and, if his theories are serious, sometimes took our blessed Constitution to be a mere shelter for such vermin as the Tapers and Tadpoles.' Two centuries of a parliamentary monarchy and a parliamentary Church, says Coningsby, have made government detested, and religion disbelieved. 'Political compromises,' says the omniscient Sidonia, 'are not to be tolerated except at periods of rude transition. An educated nation recoils from the imperfect vicariat of what is called representative government. Your House of Commons, that has absorbed all other powers in the State, will in all probability fall more rapidly than it rose.' In short, the press will take its place. This is one of those impromptu theories of history which are not to be taken too literally. Indeed, the satirical background is intended to throw into clearer relief a band of men of genius to whom has been granted some insight into the great political mystery. Who, then, are the true antitheses to the Tapers and Tadpoles? Should we compare them with a Cromwell, who has a creed as well as a political platform; and contrast 'our young Queen and our old institutions' with some new version of the old war cry, 'The sword of the Lord and of Gideon?' Or may we at least have a glimpse of a Chatham, wakening the national spirit to sweep aside the Newcastles and Bubb Dodingtons of the present day? Or, if Cromwells and Chathams be too old-fashioned, and translate the Semitic principle into a narrow English Protestantism, may we not have some genuine revolutionary fanatic, a Cimourdain or a Gauvain, to burn up all this dry chaff of mouldy politics with the fire of a genuine human passion? Such a contrast, however effective, would have been a little awkward in the year 1844. Young England

had an ideal standard of its own, and Disraeli must be the high priest of its peculiar hero-worship. Whether, in this case, political trammels injured his artistic sense, or whether his peculiar artistic tendencies injured his political career, is a question rather for the historian than the critic.

Certain it is, at any rate, that the *cénacle* of politicians, whose interests are to be thrown in relief against this mass of grovelling corruption, forms but a feeble contrast, even in the purely artistic sense. We have no right to doubt that Disraeli thought that Coningsby and his friends represented the true solution of the difficulty; yet if anybody had wished to demonstrate that a genuine belief might sometimes make a man more contemptible than hypocritical selfishness, he could scarcely have defended the paradox more ingeniously. 'Unconscious cerebration' has become a popular explanation of many phenomena; and it would hardly be fanciful to assume that one lobe of Disraeli's brain is in the habit of secreting bitter satire unknown to himself, and cunningly inserting it behind the thin veil of sentiment unconsciously elaborated by the other. We are prepared, indeed, to accept the new doctrine, as cleverly as Balzac could have inoculated us with a provisional belief in animal magnetism, to heighten our interest in a thrilling story of wonder. We have judicious hints of esoteric political doctrine, which has been partially understood by great men at various periods of our history. The whole theory is carefully worked out in the opening pages of 'Sybil.' The most remarkable thing about our popular history, so Disraeli tells us, is, that it is 'a complete mystification;' many of the principal characters never appear, as, for example, Major Wildman, who was 'the soul of English politics from 1640 to 1688.' It is not surprising,

therefore, that two of our three chief statesmen in later times should be systematically depreciated. The younger Pitt, indeed, has been extolled, though on wrong grounds. But Bolingbroke and Shelburne, our two finest political geniuses, are passed over with contempt by ordinary historians. A historian might amuse himself by tracing the curious analogy between the most showy representatives of the old race of statesmen and the modern successor who delights to sing his praises. The Patriot King is really to some extent an anticipation of Disraeli's peculiar democratic Toryism. But the chief merit of Shelburne would seem to be that the qualities which earned for him the nickname of Malagrida made him convenient as a hypothetical depository of some esoteric scheme of politics. For the purposes of fiction, at any rate, we may believe that English politics are a riddle of which only three men have guessed the true solution since the 'financial' revolution of 1688. Pitt was only sound so far as he was the pupil of Shelburne; but Bolingbroke, Shelburne, and Disraeli possessed the true key, and fully understood, for example, that Charles I. was the 'holocaust of direct taxation.' But frankly to expound this theory would be to destroy its charm, and to cast pearls before political economists. And, therefore, its existence is dimly adumbrated rather than its meaning revealed; and we have hints that there are wheels within wheels, and that in the lowest deep of mystery there is a yet deeper mystery. Coningsby and his associates, the brilliant Buckhurst and the rich Catholic country gentleman, Eustace Lyle, are but unripe neophytes, feeling after the true doctrine, but not yet fully initiated. The superlative Sidonia, the man who by thirty has exhausted all the sources of human knowledge, becomes

master of the learning of every nation, of all tongues, dead or living, and of every literature, western and oriental ; who has pursued all the speculations of science to their last term ; who has lived in all orders of society, and observed man in every phase of civilisation ; who has a penetrative intellect which enables him to follow as by intuition the most profound of all questions, and a power of communicating with precision the most abstruse ideas ; whose wealth would make Monte Cristo seem a pauper ; who is so far above his race that woman seems to him a toy, and man a machine,—this thrice miraculous Sidonia, who can yet stoop from his elevation to win a steeplechase from the Gentiles, or return their hospitality by an exquisite dinner, is the fitting depository of the precious secret. No one can ever accuse Disraeli of a want of audacity. He does not, like weaker men, shrink from introducing men of genius because he is afraid that he will not be able to make them talk in character ; and when, in 'Venetia,' he introduces Byron and Shelley, he is kind enough to write poetry for them, which produces as great an effect as the original.

And now having a true prophet, having surrounded him with a band of disciples, so that the transmitted rays of wisdom may be bearable to our mortal eyes, we expect some result worthy of this startling machinery. Let the closed casket open, and the magic light stream forth to dazzle the gazing world. We know, alas ! too well that our expectation cannot be satisfied. There is not any secret doctrine in politics. Bolingbroke may have been a very clever man, but he could not see through a stone wall. The whole hypothesis is too extravagant to admit of any downright prosaic interpretation. But something might surely be done for the imagination, if not for the reason.

Some mystic formula might be pronounced which might pass sufficiently well for an oracle so long as we are in the charmed world of fiction. Let Sidonia only repeat some magniloquent gnome from Greek, or Hebrew, or German philosophers, give us a scrap of Hegel, or of the Talmud, and we will willingly take it to be the real thing for imaginative purposes, as we allow ourselves to believe that some theatrical goblet really contains a fluid of magical efficacy. Unluckily, however, and the misfortune illustrates the inconvenience of combining politics with fiction, Disraeli had something to say, and still more unluckily that something was a mere nothing. It was the creed of Young England ; and even greater imaginative power might have failed in the effort to instil the most temporary vitality into that flimsy collection of sham beliefs. A mere sentimentalist might possibly have introduced it in such a way as to impress us at least with his own sincerity. But how is such doctrine to be uttered by lips which are, at the same time, pouring out the shrewdest of sarcasms against politicians who, if more pachydermatous, were at least more manly? In a new-fangled church, amidst incense and genuflexions and ecclesiastical millinery, one may listen patiently to a ritualist sermon ; but no mortal skill could make ritualism sound plausible in regions to which the outer air of common-sense is fairly admitted. The only mode of escape is by slurring over the doctrine, or by proclaiming it with an air of burlesque. Disraeli keeps most dexterously in the region of the ambiguous. He does at last produce his political wares with a certain *aplomb* ; but a doubtful smile about his lips encourages some of the spectators to fancy that he estimates their value pretty accurately. His last book of 'Coningsby' opens with a

Christmas scene worthy of an illustrated keepsake. We have buttery-hatches, and beef, and ale, and red cloaks, and a lord of misrule, and a hobby-horse, and a boar's head with a canticle.

> Caput apri defero,
> Reddens laudes Domino,

sing the noble ladies, and we are left to wonder whether Disraeli blushed or sneered as he wrote. Certainly we find it hard to recognise the minister who proposed to put down ritualism by an Act of Parliament. He does his very best to be serious, and anticipates critics by a passing blow at the utilitarians ; but we have a shrewd suspicion that the blow is mere swagger, to keep up his courage, or perhaps a covert hint that, though he can at times fool his friends, he is not a man to be trifled with by his enemies. What, we must ask, would Sidonia say to this dreariest of all shams? When Coningsby meets Sidonia in the forest, and expresses a wish to see Athens, the mysterious stranger replies, 'The age of ruins is past ; have you seen Manchester?' It would, indeed, be absurd to infer that Disraeli does not see the weak side of Manchester. After dilating, in 'Tancred,' upon the vitality of Damascus, he observes, 'As yet the disciples of progress have not been able exactly to match this instance ; but it is said that they have great faith in the future of Birkenhead.' Perhaps the true sentiment is that the Semitic races, the unchanging depositaries of eternal principles, look with equal indifference upon the mushroom growths of Aryan civilisation, whether an Athens or a Birkenhead be the product, but admit that the living has so far an advantage over the dead. To find the moral of 'Coningsby' may be impracticable and is at any rate irrelevant. The way to enjoy it is to look at the world through the eyes

of Sidonia. The world—at least the Gentile world—is a farce. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred are fools. Some are prosy and reasoning fools, and make excellent butts for stinging sarcasms; others are flighty and imaginative fools, and can best be ridiculed by burlesquing their folly. As for the hundredth man—the youthful Coningsby or Tancred—his enthusiasm is refreshing, and his talent undeniable; let us watch his game, applaud his talents, and always remember that great talent is almost as necessary for consummate folly as for consummate success. Adopting such maxims, we can enjoy 'Coningsby' throughout; for we need not care whether we are laughing at the author or with him. We may heartily enjoy his admirable flashes of wit, and, when he takes a serious tone, may oscillate agreeably between the beliefs that he is in solemn earnest, or in his bitterest humour; only we must not quite forget that the farce has a touch in it of tragedy, and that there is a real mystery somewhere. Satire, pure and simple, becomes wearisome. If a latent sense of humour is necessary to prevent a serious man from becoming a bore, it is still more true that some serious creed, however misty and indefinite, is required to raise the mere mocker into a genuine satirist. That is the use of Sidonia. He is ostensibly but a subordinate figure, and ye if we struck him out, the whole composition would be thrown out of harmony. Looking through his eyes, we can laugh, but we laugh with that sense of dignity which arises out of the consciousness of a secret wisdom, shadowy and indefinite in the highest degree, perilously apt to sound like nonsense if cramped by a definite utterance, but yet casting over the whole picture a kind of magical colouring, which may be mere trickery or may be a genuine illumination, but which, whilst we are not too exacting, brings out pleasant

and perplexing effects. The lights and shadows fluctuate, and solid forms melt provokingly into mist ; but we must learn to enjoy the uncertain twilight which prevails on the border-land between romance and reality, if we would enjoy the ambiguities and the ironies and the mysteries of 'Coningsby.'

The other two parts of the trilogy show the same qualities, but in different proportions. 'Sybil' is chiefly devoted to what its author calls 'an accurate and never-exaggerated picture of a remarkable period in our social history.' We need not inquire into the accuracy. It is enough to say that in this particular department Disraeli shows himself capable of rivalling in force and vivacity the best of those novelists who have tried to turn blue-books upon the condition of the people into sparkling fiction. If he is distinctly below the few novelists of truer purpose who have put into an artistic shape a profound and first-hand impression of those social conditions which statisticians try to tabulate in blue-books,—if he does not know Yorkshiremen in the sense in which Miss Brontë knew them, and still less in the sense in which Scott knew the Borderers—he can write a disguised pamphlet upon the effects of trades' unions in Sheffield with a brilliancy which might excite the envy of Mr. Charles Reade. But in 'Tancred' we again come upon the true vein of mystery in which is Disraeli's special idiosyncrasy ; and the effect is still more bewildering than in 'Coningsby.' Giving our hands to our singular guide, we are to be led into the most secret place, and be initiated into the very heart of the mystery. Tancred is Coningsby once more, but Coningsby no longer satisfied with the profound political teaching of Bolingbroke, and eager to know the very last word of that riddle which, once solved, all

theological and social and political difficulties will become plain. He is exalted to the pitch of enthusiasm at which even supernatural machinery may be introduced without a sense of discord. And yet, intentionally or from the inevitable conditions of the scheme, the satire deepens with the mystery; and the more solemn become the words and gestures of our high priest, the more marked becomes his ambiguous air of irony. Good, innocent Tancred fancies that his doubts may be solved by an English bishop; and Disraeli revels in the ludicrous picture of a young man of genius taking a bishop seriously. Yet it must be admitted that Tancred's own theory sounds to the vulgar Saxon even more nonsensical than the episcopal doctrine. His notion is that 'inspiration is not only a divine but a local quality,' and that God can only speak to man upon the soil of Palestine—a theory which has afterwards to be amended by the hypothesis, that even in Palestine, God can only speak to a man of Semitic race. Lest we should fancy that this belief contains an element of irony, it is approved by the great Sidonia; but even Sidonia is not worthy of the deep mysteries before us. He intimates to Tancred that there is one from whose lips even he himself has derived the sacred knowledge. The Spanish priest, Alonzo Lara, Jewish by race, but, as a Catholic prelate, imbued with all the later learning a member of that Church which was founded by a Hebrew, and still retains some of the 'magnetic influence'—this great man, in whom all influences thus centre, is the only worthy hierophant. And thus, after a few irresistible blows at London society, we find ourselves fairly on the road to Palestine, and listen for the great revelation. We scorn the remark of the simple Lord Milford, that there is 'absolutely no sport of any kind' near Jerusalem; and

follow Tancred where his ancestors have gone before him. We bend in reverence before the empty tomb of the Divine Prince of the house of David, and fall into ecstasies in the garden of Bethany. Solace comes, but no inspiration. Though the marvellous Lara is briefly introduced, and though a beautiful young woman comes straight out of the 'Arabian Nights,' and asks the insoluble question, What would have become of the Atonement, if the Jews had not persuaded the Romans to crucify Jesus? we are still tantalised by the promised revelation, which melts before us like a mirage. Once, indeed, on the sacred mountain of Sinai, a vision greets the weary pilgrim, in which a guardian angel talks in the best style of Sidonia or Disraeli. But we are constantly distracted by our guide's irresistible propensity for a little political satire. A Syrian Vivian Grey is introduced to us, whose intrigues are as audacious and futile as those of his English parallel, but whose office seems to be the purely satirical one of interpreting Tancred's lofty dreams into political intrigues suited to a shrewd but ignorant Oriental. Once we are convinced that the promise is to be fulfilled. Tancred reaches the strange tribe of the Ansarey, shrouded in a more than Chinese seclusion. Can they be the guardians of the 'Asian mystery?' To our amazement it turns out that they are of the faith of Mr. Phœbus of 'Lothair.' They have preserved the old gods of paganism; and their hopes, which surely cannot be those of Disraeli, are that the world will again fall prostrate before Apollo (who has a striking likeness to Tancred) or Astarte. What does it all mean? or does it all mean anything? The most solemn revelation has been given by that mysterious figure which appeared in Sinai, in 'the semblance of one who, though not young, was still untouched by time;

a countenance like an Oriental night, dark yet lustrous, mystical yet clear. Thought, rather than melancholy, spoke from the pensive passion of his eyes; while on his lofty forehead glittered a star that threw a solemn radiance on the repose of his majestic forehead.' After explaining that he was the Angel of Arabia, this person told Tancred to 'announce the sublime and solacing doctrine of Theocratic Equality.' But when Tancred, after his startling adventures, got back to Jerusalem, he found his anxious parents, the Duke and Duchess of Bellamont, accompanied by the triumvirate of bear-leaders which their solicitude had appointed to look after him—Colonel Brace, the Rev. Mr. Bernard, and Dr. Roby. And thus the novel ends like the address of Miss Hominy. 'Out laughs the stern philosopher,' or, shall we say, the incarnation of commonplace, 'What, ho! arrest me that wandering agency; and so, the vision fadeth.' Theocratic equality has not yet taken its place as an electioneering cry.

Has our guide been merely blowing bubbles for our infantile amusement? Surely he has been too solemn. We could have sworn that some of the passages were written, if not with tears in his eyes, at least with a genuine sensibility to the solemn and romantic elements of life. Or was he carried away for a time into real mysticism for which he seeks to apologise by adopting the tone of the man of the world? Surely his satire is too keen, even when it causes the collapse of his own fancies. Even Coningsby and Lord Marney, the heroes of the former novels, appear in 'Tancred' as shrewd politicians, and obviously Tancred will accept the family seat when he gets back to his paternal mansion. We can only solve the problem, if we are prosaic enough to insist upon a solution, by accepting the theory

of a double consciousness, and resolving to pray with the mystic, and sneer with the politician, as the fit takes us. It is an equal proof of intellectual dulness to be dead to either aspect of things. Let us agree that a brief sojourn in the world of fancy or in the world of blue-books is a qualification for a keener enjoyment of the other, and not brutally attempt to sever them by fixed lines. Each is best seen in the light reflected from the other, and we had best admit the fact without asking awkward questions; but they are blended after a perfectly original fashion in the strange phantasmagoria of 'Tancred.' Let the images of crusaders and modern sportsmen, Hebrew doctors and classical artists, mediæval monks and Anglican bishops, perform their strange antics before us, and the scenery shift from Manchester to Damascus, or Pall Mall to Bethany, in obedience to laws dictated by the fancy instead of the reason; let each of the motley actors be alternately the sham and the reality, and our moods shift as arbitrarily from grave to gay, from high-strung enthusiasm to mocking cynicism, and we shall witness a performance which is always amusing and original, and sometimes even poetical, and of which only the harshest realist will venture to whisper that, after all, it is a mere mystification.

But it is time to leave stories in which the critic, however anxious to observe the purely literary aspect, is constantly tempted to diverge into the political or theological theories suggested. The 'trilogy' was composed after Disraeli had become a force in politics, and the didactic tendency is constantly obtruding itself. In the period between 'Vivian Grey' (1826–7) and 'Coningsby' (1844) he had published several novels in which the prophet is lost, or nearly lost, in the artist. Of the 'Wondrous Tale of

Alroy' it is enough to say that it is a very spirited attempt to execute an impossible task. All historical novels—except Scott's and Kingsley's are a weariness to the flesh, and when the history is so remote from any association with modern feeling, even Mr. Disraeli's vivacity is not able to convert shadows into substances. An opposite error disturbs one's appreciation of 'Venetia.' Byron and Shelley were altogether too near to the writer to be made into heroes of fiction. The portraits are pale beside the originals; and though Lord Cadurcis and Marmion Herbert may have been happier men than their prototypes, they are certainly not so interesting. 'Henrietta Temple' and 'Contarini Fleming' may count as Mr. Disraeli's most satisfactory performances. He has worked without any secondary political purpose, and has, therefore, produced more harmonious results. The aim is ambitious, but consistent. 'Contarini Fleming' is the record of the development of a poetic nature—a theme, as we are told, 'virgin in the imaginative literature of every country.' The praises of Goethe, of Beckford, and of Heine gave a legitimate satisfaction to its author. 'Henrietta Temple' professes to be a love-story pure and simple. Love and poetry are certainly themes worthy of the highest art; and if Disraeli's art be not the highest, it is more effective when freed from the old alloy. The same intellectual temperament is indeed perceptible, though in this different field it does not produce quite the same results. One prominent tendency connects all his stories. When 'Lothair' made its appearance, critics were puzzled, not only by the old problem as to the seriousness of the writer, but by the extraordinary love of glitter. Were the palaces and priceless jewels and vast landed estates, distributed with such

reckless profusion amongst the characters, intended as a covert satire upon the vulgar English worship of wealth, or did they imply a genuine instinct for the sumptuous? Disraeli would apparently parody the old epitaph, and write upon the monument of every ducal millionaire, 'Of such are the kingdom of heaven.' Vast landed estates and the Christian virtues, according to him, naturally go together; and he never dismisses a hero without giving him such a letter of credit as Sidonia bestowed upon Tancred. 'If the youth who bears this requires advances, let him have as much gold as would make the right-hand lion, on the first step of the throne of Solomon the king; and if he wants more, let him have as much as would form the lion that is on the left; and so on through every stair of the royal seat.' The theory that so keen a satirist of human follies must have been more or less ironical in his professed admiration for boundless wealth, though no doubt tempting, is probably erroneous. The simplest explanation is most likely to be the truest. Disraeli has a real, unfeigned delight in simple splendour, in 'ropes of pearls,' in priceless diamonds, gorgeous clothing, and magnificent furniture. The phenomenon is curious, but not uncommon. One may sometimes find an epicure who still retains an infantile taste for sweetmeats, and is not afraid to avow it. Experience of the world taught Disraeli the hollowness of some objects of his early admiration, but it never so dulled his palate as to make pure splendour insipid to his taste. It is as easy to call this love of glitter vulgar, as to call his admiration for dukes snobbish; but the passion is too sincere to deserve any harsh name. Why should not a man have a taste for the society of dukes, or take a child's pleasure in

bright colours for their own sake? There is nothing intrinsically virtuous in preferring a dinner of herbs to the best French cookery. So long as the taste is thoroughly genuine, and is not gratified at the cost of unworthy concessions, it ought not to be offensive.

Disraeli's pictures may be, or rather they certainly are, too gaudy in their colouring, but his lavish splendour is evidently prompted by a frank artistic impulse, and certainly implies no grovelling before the ordinary British duke. It is this love of splendour, it may be said parenthetically, combined with his admiration for the non-scientific type of intellect, which makes the Roman Catholic Church so strangely fascinating for Disraeli. His most virtuous heroes and heroines are members of old and enormously rich Catholic families. His poet, Contarini Fleming, falls prostrate before the splendid shrines of a Catholic chapel, all his senses intoxicated by solemn music and sweet incense and perfect pictures. Lothair, wanting a Sidonia, only escaped by a kind of miracle from the attractions of Rome. The sensibility to such influences has a singular effect upon Disraeli's modes of representing passion. He has frankly explained his theory. The peasant-noble of Wordsworth had learnt to know love 'in huts where poor men lie,' and a long catena of poetical authorities might be adduced in support of the principle. That is not Disraeli's view. 'Love,' he says, 'that can illumine the dark hovel and the dismal garret, that sheds a ray of enchanting light over the close and busy city, seems to mount with a lighter and more glittering pinion in an atmosphere as bright as its own plumes. Fortunate the youth, the romance of whose existence is placed in a scene befitting its fair and marvellous career; fortunate the passion that is breathed in palaces,

amid the ennobling creations of surrounding art, and quits the object of its fond solicitude amidst perfumed gardens and in the shade of green and silent woods'—woods, that is, which ornament the stately parks of the aforesaid palaces. All Disraeli's passionate lovers—and they are very passionate—are provided with fitting scenery. The exquisite Sybil is allowed, by way of exception, to present herself for a moment in the graceful character of a sister of charity relieving a poor family in their garret ; but we can detect at once the stamp of noble blood in every gesture, and a coronet is ready to descend upon her celestial brow. Everywhere else we make love in gilded palaces, to born princesses in gorgeous apparel ; terraced gardens, with springing fountains and antique statues, are in the background ; or at least an ancestral castle, with long galleries filled with the armour borne by our ancestors to the Holy Land, rises in cheery state, waiting to be restored on a scale of unprecedented magnificence by the dower of our affianced brides. And, of course, the passion is suitable to such accessories. 'There is no love but at first sight,'[1]

[1] 'He never loved that loved not at first sight,' says Marlowe, and Shakespeare after him. I cannot say whether this be an undesigned literary coincidence or an appropriation. Disraeli, we know, was skilful in the art of annexation. One or two instances may be added. Here is a clear case of borrowing. Fuller says in the character of the good sea-captain in the 'Holy State'—'Who first taught the water to imitate the creatures on land, so that the sea is the stable of horse-fishes, the stye of hog-fishes, the kennel of dog-fishes, and in all things the sea is the ape of the land?' Esspер George in 'Vivian Grey,' says to the sea: 'O thou indifferent ape of earth, what art thou, O bully ocean, but the stable of horse-fishes, the stall of cow-fishes, the stye of hog-fishes, and the kennel of dog-fishes?' Other cases may be more doubtful. On one occasion, Disraeli spoke of the policy of his opponents as a combination of 'blundering and plundering.' The jingle was thought to be adapted from a previous epigram about

says Disraeli; and, indeed, love at first sight is alone natural to such beings, on whom beauty and talent have been poured out as lavishly as wealth, and who need never condescend to thoughts of their natural deeds. It is the love of Romeo and Juliet amidst the gardens of Verona; or rather the love of Aladdin of the wondrous lamp for some incomparable beauty, deserving to be enshrined in a palace erected by the hands of genii. The passion of the lover must be vivid and splendid enough to stand out worthily against so gorgeous a background; and it must flash and glitter, and dazzle our commonplace intellects.

In the 'Arabian Nights' the lover repeats a passage of

'meddling and muddling;' but here is the identical phrase: Coleridge wrote in the 'Courier:' 'The writer, whilst abroad, was once present when most bitter complaints were made of the —— government. "Government!" exclaimed a testy old captain of a Mediterranean trading-vessel, "call it *blunderment* or *plunderment* or what you like —only not a *government*!"'—Coleridge's 'Essays on his own Times,' p. 893. Disraeli is sometimes credited with the epigram in 'Lothair' about critics being authors who have failed. I know not who said this first; but it was certainly not Disraeli. Landor makes Porson tell Southey: 'Those who have failed as writers turn reviewers.' The classical passage is in Sainte-Beuve. Balzac, he says, said somewhere of a sculptor who had become discouraged: 'Redevenu artiste *in partibus*, il avait beaucoup de succès dans les salons, il était consulté par beaucoup d'amateurs; *il passa critique comme tous les impuissants qui mentent à leurs débuts.*' Sainte-Beuve, naturally indignant at a phrase aimed against his craft, if not against himself, says that this may be true of a sculptor or painter who deserts his art in order to talk; 'mais, dans l'ordre de la pensée, cette parole de M. de Balzac qui revient souvent sous la plume de toute une école de jeunes littérateurs, est à la fois (je leur en demande pardon) une injustice et une erreur.'—'Causeries du Lundi,' vol. ii. p. 455. A very similar phrase is to be found in a book where one would hardly look for such epigrams, Marryat's 'King's Own.' But to trace such witticisms to their first source is a task for 'Notes and Queries.'

poetry and then faints from emotion, and Disraeli's lovers are apt to be as demonstrative and ungovernable in their behaviour. Their happy audacity makes us forget some little defects in their conduct. Take, for example, the model love story in 'Henrietta Temple.' Told by a cold and unimaginative person, it would run to the following effect :—Ferdinand Armine was the heir of a decayed Catholic family. Going into the army, he raised great sums, like other thoughtless young men, on the strength of his expectations from his maternal grandfather, a rich nobleman. The grandfather, dying, left his property to Armine's cousin, Katherine Grandison. Armine instantly made up his mind to marry his cousin and the property, and his creditors were quieted by news of his engagement. Meanwhile he met Henrietta Temple, and fell in love with her at first sight. In spite of his judicious reticence, Miss Temple heard of his engagement to Miss Grandison, and naturally broke off the match. She fell into a consumption, and he into a brain fever. The heroes of novels are never the worse for a brain fever or two, and young Armine, though Miss Grandison becomes aware of the Temple episode, has judgment enough to hide it from everybody else, and the first engagement is not ostensibly broken off. Nay, Armine still continues to raise loans on the strength of it—a proceeding which sounds very like obtaining money on false pretences. His creditors, however, become more pressing, and at last he gets into a sponging-house. Meanwhile Miss Temple has been cured of her consumption by the heir to a dukedom, and herself becomes the greatest heiress in England by an unexpected bequest. She returns from Italy, engaged to her new lover, and hears of her old lover's misfortunes. And then a 'happy thought'

occurs to the two pairs of lovers. If Miss Temple's wealth had come earlier, she might have married Armine at first: why should she not do it now? It only requires an exchange of lovers, which is instantly effected. The heir to the dukedom marries the rich Miss Grandison; the rich Miss Temple marries Ferdinand Armine; and everybody lives in the utmost splendour ever afterwards. The moral to this edifying narrative appears to be given by the waiter at the sponging-house. 'It is only poor devils nabbed for their fifties and their hundreds that are ever done up,' says this keen observer. 'A nob was never nabbed for the sum you are, sir, and never went to the wall. Trust my experience, I never knowed such a thing.'

This judicious observation, translated into the language of art, gives Disraeli's secret. His 'nobs' are so splendid in their surroundings, such a magical light of wealth, magnificence, and rhetoric is thrown upon all their doings, that we are cheated into sympathy. Who can be hard upon a young man whose behaviour to his creditors may be questionable, but who is swept away in such a torrent of gorgeous hue? The first sight of Miss Temple is enough to reveal her dazzling complexion, her violet-tinted eyes, her lofty and pellucid brow, her dark and lustrous locks. Love for such a being is the 'transcendent and surpassing offspring of sheer and unpolluted sympathy.' It is a rapture and a madness; it is to the feelings of the ordinary mortal what sunlight is to moonlight, or wine to water. What wonder that Armine, 'pale and trembling, withdrew a few paces from the overwhelming spectacle, and leant against a tree in a chaos of emotion? A delicious and maddening impulse thrilled his frame; a storm raged in his soul; a big drop quivered on his brow; and a slight foam

played upon his lip.' But 'the tumult of his mind gradually subsided ; the fleeting memories, the saddening thoughts, that for a moment had coursed about in such wild order, vanished and melted away, and a feeling of bright serenity succeeded—a sense of beauty and joy, and of hovering and circumambient happiness.' In short, he asked the lady in to lunch. That is the love which can only be produced in palaces. Your Burns may display some warmth of feeling about a peasant girl, and Wordsworth cherish the domestic affections in a cottage ; but for the dazzling, brilliant forms of passion we must enter the world of magic, where diamonds are as plentiful as blackberries, and all surrounding objects are turned to gold by the alchemy of an excited imagination. The only difference is that, while other men assume that the commonest things will take a splendid colour as seen through a lover's eyes, Disraeli takes care that whatever his lovers see shall have a splendid colouring.

Once more, if we consent for the time to take our author's view—and that is the necessary condition for enjoying most literature—we must admit the vivacity and, at times, the real eloquence of Disraeli's rhetoric. In 'Contarini Fleming' he takes a still more ambitious flight, and with considerable success. Fleming, the embodiment of the poetic character, is, we might almost say, to other poets what Armine is to other lovers. He has the same love of brilliant effects, and the same absence of genuine tenderness. But one other qualification must be made. We feel some doubts as to his being a poet at all. He has indeed that amazing vitality with which Disraeli endows all his favourite heroes, and in which we may recognise the effervescence of youthful genius. But his genius is so versatile that we

doubt its true destination. His first literary performance is to write a version of 'Vivian Grey,' a reckless and successful satire; his most remarkable escapade is to put himself at the head of a band of students, apparently inspired by Schiller's Robbers to emulate the career of Moor; his greatest feat is a sudden stroke of diplomacy which enables him to defeat the plans of more veteran statesmen. And when he has gone through his initiation, wooed and won his marvellous beauty, and lost her in an ideal island, the final shape of his aspirations is curiously characteristic. Having become rich quite unexpectedly—for he did not know that he was to be the hero of one of Disraeli's novels—he resolved to 'create a paradise.' He bought a palladian pile, with a large estate and beautiful gardens. In this beautiful scene he intends to erect a Saracenic palace full of the finest works of modern and ancient art; and in time he hopes to 'create a scene which may rival in beauty and variety, though not in extent, the villa of Hadrian, whom I have always considered the most accomplished and sumptuous character of antiquity.' He has already laid the foundation of a tower which is to rise to a height of at least a hundred and fifty feet, and is to equal in solidity and design the most celebrated works of antiquity. Certainly the scheme is magnificent; but it is scarcely the ambition which one might have expected from a poet. Rather it is the design of a man endowed with a genuine artistic temperament, but with a strange desire to leave some showy and tangible memorial of his labours. His ambition is not to stir men's souls with profound thought, or to soften by some new harmonies the weary complaints of suffering humanity, but to startle the world by the splendid embodiment in solid marble of the most sumptuous dreams of a cultivated

imagination. Contarini Fleming, indeed, as he shows by a series of brilliant travellers' sketches, is no mean master of what may be called poetical prose. His pictures of life and scenery are vivacious, rapid, and decisive. In later years the habit of parliamentary oratory seems to have injured Disraeli's style. In 'Lothair' there is a good deal of slipshod verbiage. But in these earlier stories the style is generally excellent till it becomes too ambitious. It has a kind of metallic glitter, brilliant, sparkling with numerous flashes of wit and fancy, and never wanting in sharpness of effect, though it may be deficient in delicacy. Yet the author, who is of necessity to be partly identified with the hero of 'Contarini Fleming,' is distinctly not a poet; and the incapacity is most evident when he endeavours to pass the inexorable limits. The distinction between poetry and rhetoric is as profound as it is undefinable. A true poet, as possessing an exquisite sensibility to the capacities of his instrument, does not try to get the effects of metre when he is writing without its restrictions and its advantages. Disraeli shows occasionally a want of this delicacy of perception by breaking into a kind of compromise between the two which can only be called Ossianesque. The effect, for example, of such a passage as the following is, to my taste at least, simply grotesque :—

'Still the courser onward rushes; still his mighty heart supports him. Season and space, the glowing soil, the burning ray, yield to the tempest of his frame, the thunder of his nerves, and lightning of his veins.

'Food or water they have none. No genial fount, no graceful tree, rise with their pleasant company. Never a beast or bird is there, in that hoary desert bare. Nothing breaks the almighty stillness. Even the jackal's felon cry

might seem a soothing melody. 'A grey wild cat, with snowy whiskers, out of a withered bramble stealing, with a youthful snake in its ivory teeth, in the moonlight gleams with glee. This is their sole society.'

And so on. Some great writers have made prose as melodious as verse; and Disraeli can at times follow their example successfully. But one likes to know what one is reading; and the effect of this queer expression is as if, in the centre of a solemn march, were incorporated a few dancing-steps, *à propos* to nothing, and then subsiding into a regular pace. Milton wrote grand prose and grand verse; but you are never uncertain whether a fragment of 'Paradise Lost' may or may not have been inserted by mere accident in the 'Areopagitica.'

Not to dwell upon such minor defects, nobody can read 'Contarini Fleming' or 'Henrietta Temple' without recognising the admirable talent and exuberant vitality of the author. They have the faults of juvenile performances; they are too gaudy; the author has been tempted to turn aside too frequently in search of some brilliant epigram; he has mistaken bombast for eloquence, and mere flowery brilliance for warmth of emotion. But we might hope that longer experience and more earnest purpose might correct such defects. Alas! in the year of their publication, Disraeli first entered Parliament. His next works comprised the trilogy, where the artistic aim has become subordinate to the political or biological; and some thirty years of parliamentary labours led to 'Lothair,' of which it is easiest to assume that it is a practical joke on a large scale, or a prolonged burlesque upon Disraeli's own youthful performances. May one not lament the degradation of a promising novelist into a Prime Minister?

MASSINGER

In one of the best of his occasional essays, Kingsley held a brief for the plaintiffs in the old case of Puritans *versus* Playwrights. The litigation in which this case represents a minor issue has lasted for a period far exceeding that of the most pertinacious lawsuit, and is not likely to come to an end within any assignable limits of time. When the discussion is pressed home, it is seen to involve fundamentally different conceptions of human life and its purposes; and it can only cease when we have discovered the grounds of a permanent conciliation between the ethical and the æsthetic elements of human nature. The narrower controversy between the stage and the Church has itself a long history. It has left some curious marks upon English literature. The prejudice which uttered itself through the Puritan Prynne was inherited, in a later generation, by the High-Churchmen Collier and William Law. The attack, it is true, may be ostensibly directed—as in Kingsley's essay—against the abuse of the stage rather than against the stage itself. Kingsley pays the usual tribute to Shakespeare whilst denouncing the whole literature of which Shakespeare's dramas are the most conspicuous product. But then, everybody always distinguishes in terms between the use and the abuse; and the line of demarcation generally turns out to be singularly fluctuating and uncertain.

You can hardly demolish Beaumont and Fletcher without bringing down some of the outlying pinnacles, if not shaking the very foundations, of the temple sacred to Shakespeare.

It would be regrettable, could one stop to regret the one-sided and illogical construction of the human mind, that a fair judgment in such matters seems to require incompatible qualities. Your impartial critic or historian is generally a man who leaves out of account nothing but the essential. His impartiality means sympathy with the commonplace, and incapacity for understanding heroic faith and overpowering enthusiasm. He fancies that a man or a book can be judged by balancing a list of virtues and vices as if they were separate entities lying side by side in a box, instead of different aspects of a vital force. On the other hand, the vivid imagination which restores dead bones to life makes its possessor a partisan in extinct quarrels, and as short-sighted and unfair a partisan as the original actors. Roundheads and Cavaliers have been dead these two centuries.

> Dumb are those names erewhile in battle loud ;
> Dreamfooted as the shadow of a cloud,
> They flit across the ear.

Yet few even amongst modern writers are capable of doing justice to both sides without first making both sides colourless. Hallam judges men in the throes of a revolution as though they were parties in a lawsuit to be decided by precedents and parchments, and Carlyle cannot appreciate Cromwell's magnificent force of character without making him all but infallible and impeccable. Critics of the early drama are equally one-sided. The exquisite literary faculty of Charles Lamb revelled in detecting

beauties which had been covered with the dust of oblivion during the reign of Pope. His appreciation was intensified by that charm of discovery which finds its typical utterance in Keats's famous sonnet. He was scarcely a more impartial judge of Fletcher or Ford than 'Stout Cortes' of the new world revealed by his enterprise. We may willingly defer to his judgment of the relative value of the writers whom he discusses, but we must qualify his judgment of their intrinsic excellence by the recollection that he speaks as a lover. To him and other thoroughgoing admirers of the old drama the Puritanical onslaught upon the stage presented itself as the advent of a gloomy superstition, ruthlessly stamping out all that was beautiful in art and literature. Kingsley, an admirable hater, could perceive only the opposite aspect of the phenomena. To him the Puritan protest appears as the voice of the enlightened conscience; the revolution means the troubling of the turbid waters at the descent of the angel; Prynne's 'Histriomastix' is the blast of the trumpet at which the rotten and polluted walls of Jericho are to crumble into dust. The stage, which represented the tone of aristocratic society, rightfully perished with the order which it flattered. Courtiers had learnt to indulge in a cynical mockery of virtue, or to find an unholy attraction in the accumulation of extravagant horrors. The English drama, in short, was one of those evil growths which are fostered by deeply-seated social corruption, and are killed off by the breath of a purer air. That such phenomena occur at times is undeniable. Mr. Symonds has recently shown us, in his history of the Renaissance, how the Italian literature to which our English dramatists owed so many suggestions was the natural fruit of a society poisoned at the roots. Nor, when

we have shaken off that spirit of slavish adulation in which modern antiquarians and critics have regarded the so-called Elizabethan dramatists, can we deny that there are symptoms of a similar mischief in their writings. Some of the most authoritative testimonials have a suspicious element. Praise has been lavished upon the most questionable characteristics of the old drama. Apologists have been found not merely for its daring portrayal of human passion, but for its wanton delight in the grotesque and the horrible for its own sake ; and some critics have revenged themselves for the straitlaced censures of Puritan morality by praising work in which the author strives to atone for imaginative weakness by a choice of revolting motives. Such adulation ought to have disappeared with the first fervour of rehabilitation. Much that has been praised in the old drama is rubbish, and some of it disgusting rubbish.

The question, however, remains, how far we ought to adopt either view of the situation ? Are we bound to cast aside the later dramas of the school as simply products of corruption? It may be of interest to consider the light thrown upon this question by the works of Massinger, nearly the last of the writers who can really claim a permanent position in literature. Massinger, born in 1584, died in 1639. His surviving works were composed, with one exception, after 1620. They represent, therefore, the tastes of the playgoing classes during the rapid development of the great struggle which culminated in the rebellion. In a literary sense it is the period when the imaginative impulse represented by the great dramatists was running low. It is curious to reflect that, if Shakespeare had lived out his legitimate allowance of threescore years and ten, he might have witnessed the production, not only of the first, but of

nearly all the best works of his school; had his life been prolonged for ten years more, he would have witnessed its final extinction. Within these narrow limits of time the drama had undergone a change corresponding to the change in the national mood. The difference, for example, between Marlowe and Massinger at the opening and the close of the period—though their births were separated by only twenty years—corresponds to the difference between the temper of the generation which repelled the Armada and the temper of the generation which fretted under the rule of the first Stuarts. The misnomer of Elizabethan as applied to the whole school indicates an implicit perception that its greater achievements were due to the same impulse which took for its outward and visible symbol the name of the great Queen. But it has led also to writers being too summarily classed together who really represent very different phases in a remarkable evolution. After making all allowances for personal idiosyncrasies, we can still see how profoundly the work of Massinger is coloured by the predominant sentiment of the later epoch.

As little is known of Massinger's life as of the lives of most of the contemporary dramatists who had the good or ill fortune to be born before the days of the modern biographical mania. It is known that he, like most of his brethren, suffered grievously from impecuniosity; and he records in one of his dedications his obligations to a patron without whose bounty he would for many years have 'but faintly subsisted.' His father had been employed by Henry, Earl of Pembroke; but Massinger, though acknowledging a certain debt of gratitude to the Herbert family, can hardly have received from them any effective patronage. Whatever their relations may have been, it has been pointed out by

Professor Gardiner [1] that Massinger probably sympathised with the political views represented by the two sons of his father's patron who were successively Earls of Pembroke during the reigns of the first James and Charles. On two occasions he got into trouble with the licenser for attacks, real or supposed, upon the policy of the Government. More than one of his plays contain, according to Professor Gardiner, references to the politics of the day as distinct as those conveyed by a cartoon in 'Punch.' The general result of his argument is to show that Massinger sympathised with the views of an aristocratic party who looked with suspicion upon the despotic tendencies of Charles's Government, and thought that they could manage refractory parliaments by adopting a more spirited foreign policy. Though in reality weak and selfish enough, they affected to protest against the materialising and oppressive policy of the extreme Royalists. How far these views represented any genuine convictions, and how far Massinger's adhesion implied a complete sympathy with them, or might indicate that kind of delusion which often leads a mere literary observer to see a lofty intention in the schemes of a selfish politician, are questions which I am incompetent to discuss, and which obviously do not admit of a decided answer. They confirm, as far as they go, the general impression as to Massinger's point of view which we should derive from his writings without special interpretation. 'Shakespeare,' says Coleridge, 'gives the permanent politics of human nature' (whatever they may be!), 'and the only predilection which appears shows itself in his contempt of mobs and the populace. Massinger is a decided Whig; Beaumont and Fletcher high-flying, passive-obedience Tories.' The author of 'Coriolanus,' one

[1] *Contemporary Review* for August 1876.

would be disposed to say, showed himself a thoroughgoing aristocrat, though in an age when the popular voice had not yet given utterance to systematic political discontent. He was still a stranger to the sentiments symptomatic of an approaching revolution, and has not explicitly pronounced upon issues hardly revealed even to

> The prophetic soul
> Of the wide world dreaming of things to come.

The sense of national unity evolved in the great struggle with Spain had not yet been lost in the discord of the rising generation. The other classifications may be accepted with less reserve. The dramatists represented the views of their patrons. The drama reflected in the main the sentiments of an aristocratic class alarmed by the growing vigour of the Puritanical citizens. Fletcher is, as Coleridge says, a thoroughgoing Tory; his sentiments in 'Valentinian' are, to follow the same guidance, so 'very slavish and reptile' that it is a trial of charity to read them. Nor can we quite share Coleridge's rather needless surprise that they should emanate from the son of a bishop, and that the duty to God should be the supposed basis. A servile bishop in those days was not a contradiction in terms, and still less a servile son of a bishop; and it must surely be admitted that the theory of Divine Right may lead, illogically or otherwise, to reptile sentiments. The difference between Fletcher and Massinger, who were occasional collaborators and apparently close friends (Massinger, it is said, was buried in Fletcher's grave), was probably due to difference of temperament as much as to the character of Massinger's family connection. Massinger's melancholy is as marked as the buoyant gaiety of his friend and ally. He naturally represents the misgivings which must have beset the more thoughtful members

of his party, as Fletcher represented the careless vivacity of the Cavalier spirit. Massinger is given to expatiating upon the text that

> Subjects' lives
> Are not their prince's tennis-balls, to be bandied
> In sport away.

The high-minded Pulcheria, in the 'Emperor of the East,' administers a bitter reproof to a slavish 'projector' who

> Roars out
> All is the King's, his will above the laws;

who whispers in his ear that nobody should bring a salad from his garden without paying 'gabel,' or kill a hen without excise; who suggests that, if a prince wants a sum of money, he may make impossible demands from a city and exact arbitrary fines for its non-performance.

> Is this the way
> To make our Emperor happy? Can the groans
> Of his subjects yield him music? Must his thresholds
> Be wash'd with widows' and wrong'd orphans' tears,
> Or his power grow contemptible?

Professor Gardiner tells us that at the time at which these lines were written they need not have been taken as referring to Charles. But the vein of sentiment which often occurs elsewhere is equally significant of Massinger's view of the political situation of the time. We see what were the topics that were beginning to occupy men's minds.

Dryden made the remark, often quoted for purposes of indignant reprobation by modern critics, that Beaumont and Fletcher 'understood and imitated the conversation of gentlemen much better' (than Shakespeare); 'whose wild debaucheries and quickness of wit in repartees no poet can ever paint as they did.' It is, of course, easy enough to

reply that in the true sense of the word 'gentleman' Shakespeare's heroes are incomparably superior to those of his successors; but then this is just the sense in which Dryden did not use the word. His real meaning indicates a very sound piece of historical criticism. Fletcher describes a new social type: the 'King's Young Courtier' who is deserting the good old ways of his father, the 'old courtier of the Queen.' The change is but one step in that continuous process which has substituted the modern gentleman for the old feudal noble; but the step taken at that period was great and significant. The chivalrous type, represented in Sidney's life and Spenser's poetry, is beginning to be old-fashioned and out of place as the industrial elements of society become more prominent. The aristocrat in the rising generation finds that his occupation is going. He takes to those 'wild debaucheries' which Dryden oddly reckons among the attributes of a true gentleman; and learns the art of 'quick repartee' in the courtly society which has time enough on its hands to make a business of amusement. The euphuism and allied affectations of the earlier generation had a certain grace, as the external clothing of a serious chivalrous sentiment; but it is rapidly passing into a silly coxcombry, to be crushed by Puritanism or snuffed out by the worldly cynicism of the new generation. Shakespeare's Henry or Romeo may indulge in wild freaks or abandon themselves to the intense passions of vigorous youth; but they will settle down into good statesmen and warriors as they grow older. Their love-making is a phase in their development, not the business of their lives. Fletcher's heroes seem to be not only occupied for the moment, but to make a permanent profession of what with their predecessors was a passing phase of youthful ebullience.

It is true that we have still a long step to make before we sink to the mere *roué*, the shameless scapegrace and cynical man about town of the Restoration. To make a Wycherley you must distil all the poetry out of a Fletcher. Fletcher is a true poet; and the graceful sentiment, though mixed with a coarse alloy, still repels that unmitigated grossness which, according to Burke's famous aphorism, is responsible for half the evil of vice. He is still alive to generous and tender emotions, though it can scarcely be said that his morality has much substance in it. It is a sentiment, not a conviction, and covers without quenching many ugly and brutal emotions.

In Fletcher's wild gallants, still adorned by a touch of the chivalrous; reckless, immoral, but scarcely cynical; not sceptical as to the existence of virtue, but only admitting morality by way of parenthesis to the habitual current of their thoughts, we recognise the kind of stuff from which to frame the Cavaliers who will follow Rupert and be crushed by Cromwell. A characteristic sentiment which occurs constantly in the drama of the period represents the soldier out of work. We are incessantly treated to lamentations upon the ingratitude of the comfortable citizens who care nothing for the men to whom they owed their security. The political history of the times explains the popularity of such complaints. Englishmen were fretting under their enforced abstinence from the exciting struggles on the Continent. There was no want of Dugald Dalgettys returning from the wars to afford models for the military braggart or the bluff honest soldier, both of whom go swaggering through so many of the plays of the time. Clarendon in his Life speaks of the temptations which beset him from mixing with the military society of the time. There was a large and

increasing class, no longer finding occupation in fighting Spaniards and searching for Eldorado, and consequently, in the Yankee phrase, 'spoiling for a fight.' When the time comes, they will be ready enough to fight gallantly, and to show an utter incapacity for serious discipline. They will meet the citizens, whom they have mocked so merrily, and find that reckless courage and spasmodic chivalry do not exhaust the qualifications for military success.

Massinger represents a different turn of sentiment, which would be encouraged in some minds by the same social conditions. Instead of abandoning himself frankly to the stream of youthful sentiment, he feels that it has a dangerous aspect. The shadow of coming evils was already dark enough to suggest various forebodings. But he is also a moraliser by temperament. Mr. Ward says that his strength is owing in a great degree to his appreciation of the great moral forces; and the remark is only a confirmation of the judgment of most of his critics. It is, of course, not merely that he is fond of adding little moral tags of questionable applicability to the end of his plays. 'We are taught,' he says in the 'Fatal Dowry,'

> By this sad precedent, how just soever
> Our reasons are to remedy our wrongs,
> We are yet to leave them to their will and power
> That to that purpose have authority.

But it is, to say the least, doubtful whether anybody would have that judicious doctrine much impressed upon him by seeing the play itself. Nor can one rely much upon the elaborate and very eloquent defence of his art in the 'Roman Actor.' Paris, the actor, sets forth very vigorously that the stage tends to lay bare the snares to which youth is exposed and to inflame a noble ambition by example. If

the discharge of such a function deserves reward from the Commonwealth—

> Actors may put in for as large a share
> As all the sects of the philosophers;—
> They with cold precepts—perhaps seldom read—
> Deliver what an honourable thing
> The active virtue is; but does that fire
> The blood, or swell the veins with emulation
> To be both good and great, equal to that
> Which is presented in our theatres?

Massinger goes on to show, after the fashion of Jaques in 'As You Like It,' that the man who chooses to put on the cap is responsible for the application of the satire. He had good reasons, as we have seen, for feeling sensitive as to misunderstandings—or, rather, too thorough understandings—of this kind.

To some dramatists of the time, who should put forward such a plea, one would be inclined to answer in the sensible words of old Fuller. 'Two things,' he says, 'are set forth to us in stage plays; some grave sentences, prudent counsels, and punishment of vicious examples: and with these desperate oaths, lustful talk, and riotous acts, are so personated to the life, that wantons are tickled with delight, and feed their palates upon them. It seems the goodness is not portrayed with equal accents of liveliness as the wicked things are; otherwise men would be deterred from vicious courses, with seeing the woeful success which follows them'—a result scarcely to be claimed by the actors of the day. Massinger, however, shows more moral feeling than is expended in providing sentiments to be tacked on as an external appendage, or satisfied by an obedience to the demands of poetic justice. He is not content with knocking his villains on the head—a practice in which he, like his contemporaries,

indulges with only too much complacency. The idea which underlies most of his plays is a struggle of virtue assailed by external or inward temptations. He is interested by the ethical problems introduced in the play of conflicting passions, and never more eloquent than in uttering the emotions of militant or triumphant virtue. His view of life, indeed, is not only grave, but has a distinct religious colouring. From various indications it is probable that he was a Roman Catholic. Some of these are grotesque enough. The 'Renegado,' for example, not only shows that Massinger was, for dramatic purposes, at least, an ardent believer in baptismal regeneration, but includes—what one would scarcely have sought in such a place—a discussion as to the validity of lay-baptism. The first of his surviving plays, the 'Virgin Martyr' (in which he was assisted by Dekker), is simply a dramatic version of an ecclesiastical legend. Though it seems to have been popular at the time, the modern reader will probably think that, in this case at least, the religious element is a little out of place. An angel and a devil take an active part in the performance; miracles are worked on the stage; the unbelievers are so shockingly wicked, and the Christians so obtrusively good, that we—the worldly-minded—are sensible of a little recalcitration, unless we are disarmed by the simplicity of the whole performance. Religious tracts of all ages and in all forms are apt to produce this ambiguous effect. Unless we are quite in harmony with their assumptions, we feel that they deal too much in conventional rose-colour. The angelic and diabolic elements are not so clearly discriminated in this world, and should show themselves less unequivocally on the stage, which ought to be its mirror. Such art was not congenial to the English atmosphere; it might be suitable in

Madrid; but when forcibly transplanted to the London stage, we feel that the performance has not the simple earnestness by which alone it can be justified. The sentiment has a certain unreality, and the *naïveté* suggests affectation. The implied belief is got up for the moment and has a hollow ring. And therefore the whole work, in spite of some eloquence, is nothing better than a curiosity, as an attempt at the assimilation of a heterogeneous form of art.

A similar vein of sentiment, though not showing itself in so undiluted a form, runs through most of Massinger's plays. He is throughout a sentimentalist and a rhetorician. He is not, like the greatest men, dominated by thoughts and emotions which force him to give them external embodiment in life-like symbols. He is rather a man of much real feeling and extraordinary facility of utterance, who finds in his stories convenient occasions for indulging in elaborate didactic utterances upon moral topics. It is probably this comparative weakness of the higher imaginative faculty which makes Lamb speak of him rather disparagingly. He is too self-conscious and too anxious to enforce downright moral sentiments to satisfy a critic by whom spontaneous force and direct insight were rightly regarded as the highest poetic qualities. A single touch in Shakespeare, or even in Webster or Ford, often reveals more depth of feeling than a whole scene of Massinger's facile and often deliberately forensic eloquence. His temperament is indicated by the peculiarities of his style. It is, as Coleridge says, poetry differentiated by the smallest possible degree from prose. The greatest artists of blank verse have so complete a mastery of their language that it is felt as a fibre which runs through and everywhere strengthens the harmony, and is

yet in complete subordination to the sentiment. With a writer of the second order, such as Fletcher, the metre becomes more prominent, and at times produces a kind of monotonous sing-song, which begins to remind us unpleasantly of the still more artificial tone characteristic of the rhymed tragedies of the next generation. Massinger diverges in the opposite direction. The metre is felt enough and only just enough to give a more stately step to rather florid prose. It is one of his marks that a line frequently ends by some insignificant 'of' or 'from,' so as to exclude the briefest possible pause in reading. Thus, to take an example pretty much at random, the following instance might be easily read without observing that it was blank verse at all :—

'Your brave achievements in the war, and what you did for me, unspoken, because I would not force the sweetness of your modesty to a blush, are written here ; and that there might be nothing wanting to sum up my numerous engagements (never in my hopes to be cancelled), the great duke, our mortal enemy, when my father's country lay open to his fury and the spoil of the victorious army, and I brought into his power, hath shown himself so noble, so full of honour, temperance, and all virtues that can set off a prince ; that, though I cannot render him that respect I would, I am bound in thankfulness to admire him.'

Such a style is suitable to a man whose moods do not often hurry him into impetuous, or vivacious, or epigrammatic utterance. As the Persian poet says of his country : his warmth is not heat, and his coolness is not cold. He flows on in a quiet current, never breaking into foam or fury, but vigorous, and invariably lucid. As a pleader before a law-court—the character in which, as Mr. Ward observes,

he has a peculiar fondness for presenting himself—he would carry his audience along with him, but scarcely hold them in spell-bound astonishment or hurry them into fits of excitement. Melancholy resignation or dignified dissatisfaction will find in him a powerful exponent, but scarcely despair, or love, or hatred, or any social phase of pure unqualified passion.

The natural field for the display of such qualities is the romantic drama, which Massinger took from the hands of Beaumont and Fletcher, and endowed with greater dignity and less poetic fervour. For the vigorous comedy of real life, as Jonson understood it, he has simply no capacity ; and in his rare attempts at humour succeeds only in being at once dull and dirty. His stage is generally occupied with dignified lords and ladies, professing the most chivalrous sentiments, which are occasionally too high-flown and overstrained to be thoroughly effective, but which are yet uttered with sufficient sincerity. They are not mere hollow pretences, consciously adopted to conceal base motives ; but one feels the want of an occasional infusion of the bracing air of common sense. It is the voice of a society still inspired with the traditional sentiments of honour and self-respect, but a little afraid of contact with the rough realities of life. Its chivalry is a survival from a past epoch, not a spontaneous outgrowth of the most vital elements of contemporary development. In another generation, such a tone will be adopted by a conscious and deliberate artifice, and be reflected in mere theatrical rant. In the past, it was the natural expression of a high-spirited race, full of self-confidence and pride in its own vigorous audacity. In this transitional period it has a certain hectic flush, symptomatic of approaching decay ; anxious to give a wide berth to

realities, and most at home in the border-land where dreams are only half dispelled by the light of common day. 'Don Quixote' had sounded the knell of the old romance, but something of the old spirit still lingers, and can tinge with an interest, not yet wholly artificial, the lives and passions of beings who are thus hovering on the outskirts of the living world. The situations most characteristic of Massinger's tendency are in harmony with this tone of sentiment. They are romances taken from a considerable variety of sources, developed in a clearly connected series of scenes. They are wanting in the imaginative unity of the great plays, which show that a true poet has been profoundly moved by some profound thought embodied in a typical situation. He does not, like Shakespeare, seize his subject by the heart, because it has first fascinated his imagination ; nor, on the other hand, have we that bewildering complexity of motives and intricacy of plot which show at best a lawless and wandering fancy, and which often fairly puzzle us in many English plays, and enforce frequent reference to the list of personages in order to disentangle the crossing threads of the action. Massinger's plays are a gradual unravelling of a series of incidents, each following intelligibly from the preceding situation, and suggestive of many eloquent observations, though not developments of one master-thought. We often feel that, if external circumstances had been propitious, he would have expressed himself more naturally in the form of a prose romance than in a drama. Nor, again, does he often indulge in those exciting and horrible situations which possess such charms for his contemporaries. There are occasions, it is true, in which this element is not wanting. In the 'Unnatural Combat,' for example, we have a father killing his son in a duel, by the end of the second

act ; and when, after a succession of horrors of the worst kind, we are treated to a ghost, 'full of wounds, leading in the shadow of a lady, her face leprous,' and the worst criminal is killed by a flash of lightning, we feel that we were fully entitled to such a catastrophe. We can only say, in Massinger's words,—

> May we make use of
> This great example, and learn from it that
> There cannot be a want of power above
> To punish murder and unlawful love !

The 'Duke of Milan' again culminates with a horrible scene, rivalling, though with less power, the grotesque horrors of Webster's 'Duchess of Malfi.' Other instances might be given of concessions to that blood-and-thunder style of dramatic writing for which our ancestors had a never-failing appetite. But, as a rule, Massinger inclines, as far as contemporary writers will allow him, to the side of mercy. Instead of using slaughter so freely that a new set of actors has to be introduced to bury the old—a misfortune which sometimes occurs in the plays of the time—he generally tends to a happy solution, and is disposed not only to dismiss his virtuous characters to felicity, but even to make his villains virtuous. We have not been excited to that pitch at which our passions can only be harmonised by an effusion of blood, and a mild solution is sufficient for the calmer feelings which have been aroused.

This tendency illustrates Massinger's conception of life in another sense. Nothing is more striking in the early stage than the vigour of character of most of these heroes. Individual character, as it is said, takes the place in the modern of fate in the ancient drama. Every man is run in a mould of iron, and may break, but cannot bend. The

fitting prologue to the whole literature is provided by Marlowe's Tamburlaine, with his superhuman audacity and vast bombastic rants, the incarnation of a towering ambition which scorns all laws but its own devouring passion. Faustus, braving all penalties, human and divine, is another variety of the same type : and when we have to do with a weak character like Edward II., we feel that it is his natural destiny to be confined in a loathsome dungeon, with mouldy bread to eat and ditch-water to drink. The world is for the daring ; and though daring may be pushed to excess, weakness is the one unpardonable offence. A thoroughgoing villain is better than a trembling saint. If Shakespeare's instinctive taste revealed the absurdity of the bombastic exaggeration of such tendencies, his characters are equally unbending. His villains die, like Macbeth and Iago, with their teeth set, and scorn even a deathbed repentance. Hamlet exhibits the unfitness for a world of action of the man who is foolish enough to see two sides to every question. So again, Chapman, the writer who in fulness and fire of thought approaches most nearly to Shakespeare, is an ardent worshipper of pure energy of character. His Bussy d'Ambois cannot be turned from his purpose even by the warnings of the ghost of his accomplice, and a mysterious spirit summoned expressly to give advice. An admirably vigorous phrase from one of the many declamations of his hero Byron—another representative of the same haughty strength of will—gives his theory of character :—

> Give me a spirit that on this life's rough sea
> Loves t' have his sail filled with a lusty wind,
> Even till his sailyards tremble, his masts crack,
> And his rapt ship run on her side so low
> That she drinks water, and her keel plows air,

Pure, undiluted energy, stern force of will, delight in danger for its own sake, contempt for all laws but the self-imposed, those are the cardinal virtues, and challenge our sympathy even when they lead their possessor to destruction. The psychology implied in Jonson's treating of 'humour' is another phase of the same sentiment. The side by which energetic characters lend themselves to comedy is the exaggeration of some special trait which determines their course as tyrannically as ambition governs the character suited for tragedy.

When we turn to Massinger, this boundless vigour has disappeared. The blood has grown cool. The tyrant no longer forces us to admiration by the fulness of his vitality and the magnificence of his contempt for law. Whether for good or bad, he is comparatively a poor creature. He has developed an uneasy conscience, and even whilst affecting to defy the law trembles at the thought of an approaching retribution. His boasts have a shrill, querulous note in them. His creator does not fully sympathise with his passion. Massinger cannot throw himself into the situation; and is anxious to dwell upon the obvious moral considerations which prove such characters to be decidedly inconvenient members of society for their tamer neighbours. He is of course the more in accordance with a correct code of morality, but fails correspondingly in dramatic force and brilliance of colour. To exhibit a villain truly, even to enable us to realise the true depth of his villainy, one must be able for a moment to share his point of view, and therefore to understand the true law of his being. It is a very sound rule in the conduct of life that we should not sympathise with scoundrels. But the morality of the poet, as of the scientific psychologist, is founded upon the unflinching

veracity which sets forth all motives with absolute impartiality. Some sort of provisional sympathy with the wicked there must be, or they become mere impossible monsters or the conventional scarecrows of improving tracts.

This is Massinger's weakest side. His villains want backbone, and his heroes are deficient in simple overmastering passion, or supplement their motives by some overstrained and unnatural crotchet. Impulsiveness takes the place of vigour, and indicates the want of a vigorous grasp of the situation. Thus, for example, the 'Duke of Milan,' which is certainly amongst the more impressive of Massinger's plays, may be described as a variation upon the theme of 'Othello.' To measure the work of any other writer by its relation to that masterpiece is, of course, to apply a test of undue severity. Of comparison, properly speaking, there can be no question. The similarity of the situation, however, may bring out Massinger's characteristics. The Duke, who takes the place of Othello, is, like his prototype, a brave soldier. The most spirited and effective passage in the play is the scene in which he is brought as a prisoner before Charles V., and not only extorts the admiration of his conqueror, but wins his liberty by a dignified avowal of his previous hostility, and avoidance of any base compliance. The Duke shows himself to be a high-minded gentleman, and we are so far prepared to sympathise with him, when exposed to the wiles of Francisco—the Iago of the piece. But, unfortunately, the scene is not merely a digression in a constructive sense, but involves a psychological inconsistency. The gallant soldier contrives to make himself thoroughly contemptible. He is represented as excessively

uxorious, and his passion takes a very disagreeable turn of posthumous jealousy. He has instructed Francisco to murder the wife whom he adores, in case of his own death during the war, and thus to make sure that she could not marry anybody else. On his return, the wife, who has been informed by the treachery of Francisco of this pleasant arrangement, is naturally rather cool to him ; whereupon he flies into a rage and swears that he will

> Never think of curs'd Marcelia more.

His affection returns in another scene, but only in order to increase his jealousy, and on hearing Francisco's slander he proceeds to stab his wife out of hand. It is the action of a weak man in a passion, not of a noble nature tortured to madness. Finding out his mistake, he of course repents again, and expresses himself with a good deal of eloquence which would be more effective if we could forget the overpowering pathos of the parallel scene in 'Othello.' Much sympathy, however, is impossible for a man whose whole conduct is so flighty, and so obviously determined by the immediate demands of successive situations of the play, and not the varying manifestation of a powerfully conceived character. Francisco is a more coherent villain, and an objection made by Hazlitt to his apparent want of motive is at least equally valid against Iago ; but he is of course but a diluted version of that superlative villain, as Marcelia is a rather priggish and infinitely less tender Desdemona. The failure, however, of the central figure to exhibit any fixity of character is the real weakness of the play ; and the horrors of the last scene fail to atone for the want of the vivid style which reveals an 'intense and gloomy mind.'

This kind of versatility and impulsiveness of character

is revealed by the curious convertibility—if one may use the word—of his characters. They are the very reverse of the men of iron of the previous generation. They change their state of mind as easily as the characters of the contemporary drama put on disguises. We are often amazed at the simplicity which enables a whole family to suppose the brother and father to whom they have been speaking ten minutes before to be an entire stranger, because he has changed his coat or talks broken English. The audience must have been easily satisfied in such cases; but it requires almost equal simplicity to accept some of Massinger's transformations. In such a play as the 'Virgin Martyr,' a religious conversion is a natural part of the scheme. Nor need we be surprised at the amazing facility with which a fair Mahommedan is converted in the 'Renegado' by the summary assertion that the 'juggling Prophet' is a cheat, and taught a pigeon to feed in his ear. Can there be strength, it is added, in that religion which allows us to fear death? 'This is unanswerable,' exclaims the lady, 'and there is something tells me I err in my opinion.' This is almost as good as the sudden thought of swearing eternal friendship in the 'Anti-Jacobin.' The hardened villain of the first act in the same play falls into despair in the third, and, with the help of an admirable Jesuit, becomes a most useful and exemplary convert by the fifth. But such catastrophes may be regarded as more or less miraculous. The versatility of character is more singular when religious conversions are not in question. 'I am certain,' says Philanax in the 'Emperor of the East,'

> 'A prince so soon in his disposition altered
> Was never heard nor read of.'

That proves that Philanax was not familiar with Massinger's plays. The disposition of princes and of subjects is there constantly altered with the most satisfactory result. It is not merely that, as often happens elsewhere, the villains are summarily forced to repent at the end of a play, like Angelo in 'Measure for Measure,' in order to allow the curtain to fall upon a prospect of happiness. Such forced catastrophes are common, if clumsy enough. But there is something malleable in the very constitution of Massinger's characters. They repent half-way through the performance, and see the error of their ways with a facility which we could wish to be imitated in common life. The truth seems to be that Massinger is subject to an illusion natural enough to a man who is more of the rhetorician than the seer. He fancies that eloquence must be irresistible. He takes the change of mood produced by an elevated appeal to the feelings for a change of character. Thus, for example, in the 'Picture'—a characteristic, though not a very successful play—we have a story founded upon the temptations of a separated husband and wife. The husband carries with him a magical picture, which grows dark or bright according to the behaviour of the wife, whom it represents. The husband is tempted to infidelity by a queen, herself spoilt by the flatteries of an uxorious husband; and the wife by a couple of courtiers, who have all the vices of Fletcher's worst heroes without any of their attractions. The interest of the play, such as it is, depends upon the varying moods of the chief actors, who become so eloquent under a sense of wrong or a reflection upon the charms of virtue, that they approach the bounds of vice, and then gravitate back to respectability. Everybody becomes perfectly respectable before the end of the play

is reached, and we are to suppose that they will remain respectable ever afterwards. They avoid tragic results by their want of the overmastering passions which lead to great crimes or noble actions. They are really eloquent, but even more moved by their eloquence than the spectators can be. They form the kind of audience which would be most flattering to an able preacher, but in which a wise preacher would put little confidence. And, therefore, besides the fanciful incident of the picture, they give us an impression of unreality. They have no rich blood in their veins ; and are little better than lay figures taking up positions as it may happen, in order to form an effective tableau illustrative of an unexceptionable moral.

There is, it is true, one remarkable exception to the general weakness of Massinger's characters. The vigour with which Sir Giles Overreach is set forth has made him the one well-known figure in Massinger's gallery, and the 'New Way to Pay Old Debts' showed, in consequence, more vitality than any of his other plays. Much praise has been given, and not more than enough, to the originality and force of the conception. The conventional miser is elevated into a great man by a kind of inverse heroism, and made terrible instead of contemptible. But it is equally plain that here, too, Massinger fails to project himself fairly into his villain. His rants are singularly forcible, but they are clearly what other people would think about him, not what he would really think, still less what he would say, of himself. Take, for example, the very fine speech in which he replies to the question of the virtuous nobleman, whether he is not frightened by the imprecations of his victims :—

> Yes, as rocks are
> When foaming billows split themselves against

Their flinty sides; or as the moon is moved
When wolves, with hunger pined, howl at her brightness.
I am of a solid temper, and, like these,
Steer on a constant course; with mine own sword,
If called into the field, I can make that right
Which fearful enemies murmur at as wrong.
Now, for those other piddling complaints
Breath'd out in bitterness, as when they call me
Extortioner, tyrant, cormorant, or intruder
On my poor neighbour's rights or grand incloser
Of what was common to my private use,
Nay, when my ears are pierced with widows' cries
And undone orphans wash with tears my threshold,
I only think what 'tis to have my daughter
Right honourable; and 'tis a powerful charm
Makes me insensible to remorse or pity,
Or the least sting of conscience.

Put this into the third person; read 'he' for 'I,' and 'his' for 'my,' and it is an admirable bit of denunciation of a character probably intended as a copy from life. It is a description of a wicked man from outside; and wickedness seen from outside is generally unreasonable and preposterous. When it is converted, by simple alteration of pronouns, into the villain's own account of himself, the internal logic which serves as a pretext disappears, and he becomes a mere monster. It is for this reason that, as Hazlitt says, Massinger's villains—and he was probably thinking especially of Overreach and Luke in 'A City Madam'—appear like drunkards or madmen. His plays are apt to be a continuous declamation, cut up into fragments, and assigned to the different actors; and the essential unfitness of such a method to dramatic requirements needs no elaborate demonstration. The villains will have to denounce themselves, and will be ready to undergo conversion at a moment's notice, in order to spout openly on behalf of virtue

as vigorously as they have spouted in transparent disguise on behalf of vice.

There is another consequence of Massinger's romantic tendency, which is more pleasing. The chivalrous ideal of morality involves a reverence for women, which may be exaggerated or affected, but which has at least a genuine element in it. The women on the earlier stage have comparatively a bad time of it amongst their energetic companions. Shakespeare's women are undoubtedly most admirable and lovable creatures ; but they are content to take a subordinate part, and their highest virtue generally includes entire submission to the will of their lords and masters. Some, indeed, have an abundant share of the masculine temperament, like Cleopatra or Lady Macbeth ; but then they are by no means model characters. Iago's description of the model woman is a cynical version of the true Shakespearean theory. Women's true sphere, according to him, or according to the modern slang, is domestic life ; and if circumstances force a Cordelia, an Imogen, a Rosalind, or a Viola, to take a more active share in life, they take good care to let us know that they have a woman's heart under their man's doublet. The weaker characters in Massinger give a higher place to women, and justify it by a sentiment of chivalrous devotion. The excess, indeed, of such submissiveness is often satirised. In the 'Roman Actor,' the 'Emperor of the East,' the 'Duke of Milan,' the 'Picture,' and elsewhere, we have various phases of uxorious weakness, which suggests a possible application to the Court of Charles I. Elsewhere, as in the 'Maid of Honour' and the 'Bashful Lover,' we are called upon to sympathise with manifestations of a highflown devotion to feminine excellence. Thus, the bashful lover, who is the hero of one of

his characteristic dramatic romancès, is a gentleman who thinks himself scarcely worthy to touch his mistress's shoe-string. On the sight of her he exclaims—

> As Moors salute
> The rising sun with joyful superstition,
> I could fall down and worship. – O my heart !
> Like Phœbe breaking through an envious cloud,
> Or something which no simile can express,
> She shows to me ; a reverent fear, but blended
> With wonder and astonishment, does possess me.

When she condescends to speak to him, the utmost that he dares to ask is liberty to look at her, and he protests that he would never aspire to any higher privilege. It is gratifying to add that he follows her through many startling vicissitudes of fortune in a spirit worthy of this exordium, and of course is finally persuaded that he may allow himself a nearer approach to his goddess. The Maid of Honour has two lovers, who accept a rather similar position. One of them is unlucky enough to be always making mischief by well-meant efforts to forward her interest. He, poor man, is rather ignominiously paid off in downright cash at the end of the piece. His more favoured rival listens to the offers of a rival duchess, and ends by falling between two stools. He resigns himself to the career of a Knight of Malta, whilst the Maid of Honour herself retires into a convent. Mr. Gardiner compares this catastrophe unfavourably with that of 'Measure for Measure,' and holds that it is better for a lady to marry a duke than to give up the world as, on the whole, a bad business. A discussion of that question would involve some difficult problems. If, however, Isabella is better provided for by Shakespeare than Camiola, 'the Maid of Honour,' by Massinger, we must surely agree that the Maid of Honour has the advantage of poor Mariana,

whose reunion with her hypocritical husband certainly strikes one as a questionable advantage. Her fate seems to intimate that marriage with a hypocritical tyrant ought to be regarded as better than no marriage at all. Massinger's solution is, at any rate, in harmony with the general tone of chivalrous sentiment. A woman who has been placed upon a pinnacle by overstrained devotion, cannot, consistently with her dignity, console herself like an ordinary creature of flesh and blood. When her worshippers turn unfaithful she must not look out for others. She may permit herself for once to return the affection of a worthy lover; but, when he fails, she must not condescend again to love. That would be to admit that love was a necessity of her life, not a special act of favour for some exceptional proofs of worthiness. Given the general tone of sentiment, I confess that, to my taste, Massinger's solution has the merit, not only of originality, but of harmony. It may, of course, be held that a jilted lady should, in a perfectly healthy state of society, have some other alternative besides a convent or an unworthy marriage. Some people, for example, may hold that she should be able to take to active life as a lawyer or a professor of medicine; or they may hold that love ought not to hold so prominent a part even in a woman's life that disappointed passion should involve, as a necessary consequence, the entire abandonment of the world. But, taking the romantic point of view, of which it is the very essence to set an extravagant value upon love, and remembering that Massinger had not heard of modern doctrines of woman's rights, one must admit, I think, that he really shows, by the best means in his power, a strong sense of the dignity of womanhood, and that his catastrophe is more satisfactory than the violent death or the consignment to an

inferior lover which would have commended themselves to most Elizabethan dramatists.

The same vein of chivalrous sentiment gives a fine tone to some of Massinger's other plays ; to the 'Bondman,' for example, and the 'Great Duke of Florence,' in both of which the treatment of lover's devotion shows a higher sense of the virtue of feminine dignity and purity than is common in the contemporary stage. There is, of course, a want of reality, an admission of extravagant motives, and an absence of dramatic concentration, which indicate an absence of high imaginative power. Chivalry, at its best, is not very reconcilable with common sense ; and the ideal hero is divided, as Cervantes shows, by very narrow distinctions from the downright madman. What was absurd in the more vigorous manifestations of the spirit does not vanish when its energy is lowered, and the rhetorician takes the place of the poet. But the sentiment is still genuine, and often gives real dignity to Massinger's eloquent speeches. It is true that, in apparent inconsistency with this excellence, passages of Massinger are even more deeply stained than usual with revolting impurities. Not only are his bad men and women apt to be offensive beyond all bearable limits, but places might be pointed out in which even his virtuous women indulge in language of the indescribable variety. The inconsistency of course admits of an easy explanation. Chivalrous sentiment by no means involves perfect purity, nor even a lofty conception of the true meaning of purity. Even a strong religious feeling of a certain kind is quite compatible with considerable laxity in this respect. Charles I was a virtuous monarch, according to the admission of his enemies ; but, as Kingsley remarks, he suggested a plot to Shirley which would certainly not be consistent with the

most lax modern notions of decency. The Court of which he was the centre certainly included a good many persons who might have at once dictated Massinger's most dignified sentiments and enjoyed his worst ribaldry. Such, for example, if Clarendon's character of him be accurate, would have been the supposed 'W. H.,' the elder of the two Earls of Pembroke, with whose family Massinger was so closely connected. But it is only right to add that Massinger's errors in this kind are superficial, and might generally be removed without injury to the structure of his plays.

I have said enough to suggest the general nature of the answer which would have to be made to the problem with which I started. Beyond all doubt, it would be simply preposterous to put down Massinger as a simple product of corruption. He does not mock at generous, lofty instincts, or overlook their influence as great social forces. Mr. Ward quotes him as an instance of the connection between poetic and moral excellence. The dramatic effectiveness of his plays is founded upon the dignity of his moral sentiment; and we may recognise in him 'a man who firmly believes in the eternal difference between right and wrong.' I subscribe most willingly to the truth of Mr. Ward's general principle, and, with a certain reservation, to the correctness of this special illustration. But the reservation is an important one. After all, can anybody say honestly that he is braced and invigorated by reading Massinger's plays? Does he perceive any touch of what we feel when we have been in company, say, with Sir Walter Scott; a sense that our intellectual atmosphere is clearer than usual, and that we recognise more plainly than we are apt to do the surpassing value of manliness, honesty, and pure domestic affection?

Is there not rather a sense that we have been all the time in an unnatural region, where, it is true, a sense of honour and other good qualities come in for much eloquent praise, but where, above everything, there is a marked absence of downright wholesome common-sense? Of course the effect is partly due to the region in which the old dramatists generally sought for their tragic situations. We are never quite at home in this fictitious cloudland, where the springs of action are strange, unaccountable, and altogether different from those with which we have to do in the workaday world. A great poet, indeed, weaves a magic mirror out of these dream-like materials, in which he shows us the great passions, love, and jealousy, and ambition, reflected upon a gigantic scale. But, in weaker hands, the characters become eccentric instead of typical; his vision simply distorts instead of magnifying the fundamental truths of human nature. The liberty which could be used by Shakespeare becomes dangerous for his successors. Instead of a legitimate idealisation, we have simply an abandonment of any basis in reality.

The admission that Massinger is moral must therefore be qualified by the statement that he is unnatural; or, in other words, that his morality is morbid. The groundwork of all the virtues, we are sometimes told, is strength. A strong nature may be wicked, but a weak one cannot attain any high moral level. The correlative doctrine in literature is, that the foundation of all excellence, artistic or moral, is a vivid perception of realities and a masculine grasp of facts. A man who has that essential quality will not blink the truths which we see illustrated every day around us. He will not represent vice as so ugly that it can have no charms, so foolish that it can never be

plausible, or so unlucky that it can never be triumphant. The robust moralist admits that vice is often pleasant, and that wicked men flourish like a green bay-tree. He cannot be over-anxious to preach, for he feels that the intrinsic charm of high qualities can dispense with any artificial attempts to bolster them up by sham rhetoric, or to slur over the hard facts of life. He will describe Iago as impartially as Desdemona, and, having given us the facts, leave us to make what we please of them. It is the mark of a more sickly type of morality, that it must always be distorting the plain truth. It becomes sentimental because it wishes to believe that what is pleasant must be true. It makes villains condemn themselves, because such a practice would save so much trouble to judges and moralists. Not appreciating the full force of passions, it allows the existence of grotesque and eccentric motives. It fancies that a little rhetoric will change the heart as well as the passing mood, and represents the claims of virtue as perceptible on the most superficial examination. The morality which requires such concessions becomes necessarily effeminate; it is unconsciously giving up its strongest position by implicitly admitting that the world in which virtue is possible is a very different one from our own.

The decline of the great poetic impulse does not yet reveal itself by sheer blindness to moral distinctions, or downright subservience to vice. A lowered vitality does not necessarily imply disease, though it is favourable to the development of vicious germs. The morality which flourishes in an exhausted soil is not a plant of hardy growth and tough fibre, nourished by rough common-sense, flourishing amongst the fierce contests of vigorous passions, and delighting in the open air and the broad daylight. It loves

the twilight of romance, and creates heroes impulsive, eccentric, extravagant in their resolves, servile in their devotion, and whose very natures are more or less allied to weakness and luxurious self-indulgence. Massinger, indeed, depicts with much sympathy the virtues of the martyr and the penitent ; he can illustrate the paradox that strength can be conquered by weakness, and violence by resignation. His good women triumph by softening the hearts of their persecutors. Their purity is more attractive than the passions of their rivals. His deserted King shows himself worthy of more loyalty than his triumphant persecutors. His Roman actor atones for his weakness by voluntarily taking part in his own punishment.

Such passive virtues are undoubtedly most praiseworthy ; but they may border upon qualities not quite so praiseworthy. It is a melancholy truth that your martyr is apt to be a little sanctimonious, and that a penitent is generally a bit of a sneak. Resignation and self-restraint are admirable qualities, but admirable in proportion to the force of the opposing temptation. The strong man curbing his passions, the weak woman finding strength in patient suffering, are deserving of our deepest admiration ; but in Massinger we feel that the triumph of virtue implies rather a want of passion than a power of commanding it, and that resignation is comparatively easy when it connotes an absence of active force. The general lowering of vitality, the want of rigid dramatic colouring, deprive his martyrs of that background of vigorous reality against which their virtues would be forcibly revealed. His pathos is not vivid and penetrating. Truly pathetic power is produced only when we see that it is a sentiment wrung from a powerful intellect by keen sympathy with the wrongs of life. We are affected by the

tears of a strong man ; but the popular preacher who enjoys weeping produces in us nothing but contempt. Massinger's heroes and heroines have not, we may say, backbone enough in them to make us care very deeply for their sorrows. And they moralise rather too freely. We do not want sermons, but sympathy, when we are in our deepest grief ; and we not feel that any one feels very keenly who can take his sorrows for a text, and preach in his agony upon the vanity of human wishes or the excellence of resignation.

Massinger's remarkable flow of genuine eloquence, his real dignity of sentiment, his sympathy for virtuous motive, entitle him to respect ; but we cannot be blind to the defect which keeps his work below the level of his greatest contemporaries. It is, in one word, a want of vital force. His writing is pitched in too low a key. He is not invigorating, stimulating, capable of fascinating us by the intensity of his conceptions. His highest range is a dignified melancholy or a certain chivalrous recognition of the noble side of human nature. The art which he represents is still a genuine and spontaneous growth instead of an artificial manufacture. He is not a mere professor of deportment, or maker of fine phrases. The days of mere affectation have not yet arrived ; but, on the other hand, there is an absence of that grand vehemence of soul which breathes in the spontaneous, if too lawless, vigour of the older race. There is something hollow under all this stately rhetoric ; there are none of those vivid phrases which reveal minds moved by strong passions and excited by new aspects of the world. The sails of his verse are not, in Chapman's phrase, 'filled with a lusty wind,' but moving at best before a steady breath of romantic sentiment, and sometimes flapping rather

ominously for want of true impulse. High thinking may still be there, but it is a little self-conscious, and in need of artificial stimulant. The old strenuous spirit has disappeared or gone elsewhere—perhaps to excite a Puritan imagination, and create another incarnation of the old type of masculine vigour in the hero of 'Paradise Lost.'

FIELDING'S NOVELS

A DOUBLE parallel has often been pointed out between the two pairs of novelists who were most popular in the middle of our own and of the preceding century. The intellectual affinity which made Smollett the favourite author of Dickens is scarcely so close as that which commended Fielding to Thackeray. The resemblance between 'Pickwick,' and 'Humphrey Clinker,' or between 'David Copperfield' and 'Roderick Random,' consists chiefly in the exuberance of animal spirits, the keen eye for external oddity, the consequent tendency to substitute caricature for portrait, and the vivid transformation of autobiography into ostensible fiction, which are characteristic of both authors. Between Fielding and Thackeray the resemblance is closer. The peculiar irony of 'Jonathan Wild' has its closest English parallel in 'Barry Lyndon.' The burlesque in 'Tom Thumb' of the Lee and Dryden school of tragedy may remind us of Thackeray's burlesques of Scott and Dumas. The characters of the two authors belong to the same family. 'Vanity Fair' has grown more decent since the days of Lady Bellaston, but the costume of the actors has changed more than their nature. Rawdon Crawley would not have been surprised to meet Captain Booth in a sponging-house; Shandon and his friends preserved the old traditions of Fielding's Grub Street; Lord Steyne and Major

Pendennis were survivals from the more congenial period of Lord Fellamar and Colonel James; and the two Amelias represent cognate ideals of female excellence. Or, to take an instance of similarity in detail, might not this anecdote from 'The Covent Garden Journal' have rounded off a paragraph in the 'Snob Papers?' A friend of Fielding saw a dirty fellow in a mud-cart lash another with his whip, saying, with an oath, 'I will teach you manners to your betters.' Fielding's friend wondered what could be the condition of this social inferior of a mud-cart driver, till he found him to be the owner of a dust-cart driven by asses. The great butt of Fielding's satire is, as he tells us, affectation; the affectation which he specially hates is that of strait-laced morality; Thackeray's satire is more generally directed against the particular affectation called snobbishness; but the evil principle attacked by either writer is merely one avatar of the demon assailed by the other.

The resemblance, which extends in some degree to style, might perhaps be shown to imply a very close intellectual affinity. I am content, however, to notice the literary genealogy as illustrative of the fact that Fielding was the ancestor of one great race of novelists. 'I am,' he says expressly in 'Tom Jones,' 'the founder of a new province of writing.' Richardson's 'Clarissa'[1] and Smollett's 'Roderick Random' were indeed published before 'Tom Jones;' but the provinces over which Richardson and Smollett reigned were distinct from the contiguous province of which Fielding claimed to be the first legislator.

[1] Richardson wrote the first part of 'Pamela' between November 10, 1739, and January 10, 1740. 'Joseph Andrews' appeared in 1742. The first four volumes of 'Clarissa Harlowe' and 'Roderick Random' appeared in the beginning of 1748; 'Tom Jones' in 1749.

Smollett (who comes nearest) professed to imitate 'Gil Blas' as Fielding professed to imitate Cervantes. Smollett's story inherits from its ancestry a reckless looseness of construction. It is a series of anecdotes strung together by the accident that they all happen to the same person. 'Tom Jones,' on the contrary, has a carefully constructed plot, if not, as Coleridge asserts, one of the three best plots in existence (its rivals being 'Œdipus Tyrannus' and 'The Alchemist'). Its excellence depends upon the skill with which it is made subservient to the development of character and the thoroughness with which the working motives of the persons involved have been thought out. Fielding claims—even ostentatiously—that he is writing a history, not a romance; a history not the less true because all the facts are imaginary, for the fictitious incidents serve to exhibit the most general truths of human character. It is by this seriousness of purpose that his work is distinguished from the old type of novel, developed by Smollett, which is but a collection of amusing anecdotes; or from such work as De Foe's, in which the external facts are given with an almost provoking indifference to display of character and passion. Fielding's great novels have a true organic unity as well as a consecutive story, and are intended in our modern jargon as genuine studies in psychological analysis.[1]

Johnson, no mean authority when in his own sphere and free from personal bias, expressly traversed this claim; he declared that there was more knowledge of the human heart in a letter of 'Clarissa' than in the whole of 'Tom Jones;' and said more picturesquely, that Fielding could tell the hour by looking at the dial-plate, whilst Richardson knew

[1] See some appreciative remarks upon this in Scott's preface to the 'Monastery.'

how the clock was made.[1] It is tempting to set this down as a Johnsonian prejudice, and to deny or retort the comparison. Fielding, we might say, paints flesh and blood; whereas Richardson consciously constructs his puppets out of frigid abstractions. Lovelace is a bit of mechanism; Tom Jones a human being. In fact, however, such comparisons are misleading. Nothing is easier than to find an appropriate ticket for the objects of our criticism, and summarily pigeon-hole Richardson as an idealist and Fielding as a realist; Richardson as subjective and morbid, Fielding as objective and full of coarse health; or to attribute to either of them the deepest knowledge of the human heart. These are the mere banalities of criticism; and I can never hear them without a suspicion that a professor of æsthetics is trying to hoodwink me by a bit of technical platitude. The cant phrases which have been used so often by panegyrists too lazy to define their terms, have become almost as meaningless as the complimentary formulæ of society.

Knowledge of the human heart in particular is a phrase which covers very different states of mind. It may mean that power by which the novelist or dramatist identifies himself with his characters; sees through their eyes and feels with their senses; it is the product of a rich nature, a vivid imagination, and great powers of sympathy, and draws a comparatively small part of its resources from external experience. The novelist knows how his characters would feel under given conditions, because he feels it himself; he sees from within, not from without; and is almost

[1] It is rather curious that Richardson uses the same comparison to Miss Fielding. He assures her that her brother only knew the outside of a clock, whilst she knew all the finer springs and movements of its inside. See 'Richardson's Correspondence,' ii. 105.

undergoing an actual experience instead of condensing his observations on life. This is the power in which Shakespeare is supreme; which Richardson proved himself, in his most powerful passages, to possess in no small degree; and which in Balzac seems to have generated fits of absolute hallucination.

Fielding's novels are not without proof of this power, as no great imaginative work can be possible without it; but the knowledge for which he is specially conspicuous differs almost in kind. This knowledge is drawn from observation rather than intuitive sympathy. It consists in great part of those weighty maxims which a man of keen powers of observation stores up in his passage through a varied experience. It is the knowledge of Ulysses, who has known

> Cities of men
> And manners, climates, councils, governments;

the knowledge of a Macchiavelli, who has looked behind the screen of political hypocrisies; the knowledge of which the essence is distilled in Bacon's 'Essays;' or the knowledge of which Polonius seems to have retained many shrewd scraps even when he had fallen into his dotage. In reading 'Clarissa' or 'Eugénie Grandet' we are aware that the soul of Richardson or Balzac has transmigrated into another shape; that the author is projected into his character, and is really giving us one phase of his own sentiments. In reading Fielding we are listening to remarks made by a spectator instead of an actor; we are receiving the pithy recollections of the man about town; the prodigal who has been with scamps in gambling-houses, and drunk beer in pothouses and punch with country squires; the keen observer who has judged all characters, from Sir Robert

Walpole down to Betsy Canning;[1] who has fought the hard battle of life with unflagging spirit, though with many falls; and who, in spite of serious stains, has preserved the goodness of his heart and the soundness of his head. The experience is generally given in the shape of typical anecdotes rather than in explicit maxims; but it is not the less distinctly the concentrated essence of observation, rather than the spontaneous play of a vivid imagination. Like Balzac, Fielding has portrayed the 'Comédie Humaine;' but his imagination has never overpowered the coolness of his judgment. He shows a superiority to his successor in fidelity almost as marked as his inferiority in vividness. And, therefore, it may be said in passing, it is refreshing to read Fielding at a time when this element of masculine observation is the one thing most clearly wanting in modern literature. Our novels give us the emotions of young ladies, which, in their way, are very good things; they reflect the sentimental view of life, and the sensational view, and the commonplace view, and the high philosophical view. One thing they do not tell us. What does the world look like to a shrewd police-magistrate, with a keen eye in his head and a sound heart in his bosom? It might be worth knowing. Perhaps (who can tell?) it would still look rather like Fielding's world.

The peculiarity is indicated by Fielding's method. Scott,

[1] Fielding blundered rather strangely in the celebrated Betsy Canning case, as Balzac did in the 'Affaire Peytel;' but the story is too long for repetition in this place. The trials of Miss Canning and her supposed kidnappers are amongst the most amusing in the great collection of State Trials. See vol. xix. of the 8vo edition. Fielding's defence of his own conduct in the matter is reprinted in his 'Miscellanies and Poems,' being the supplementary volume of the last collected edition of his works.

who, like Fielding, generally describes from the outside, is content to keep himself in the background. 'Here,' he says to his readers, 'are the facts ; make what you can of them.' Fielding will not efface himself ; he is always present as chorus ; he tells us what moral we ought to draw ; he overflows with shrewd remarks, given in their most downright shape, instead of obliquely suggested through the medium of anecdotes ; he likes to stop us as we pass through his portrait gallery ; to take us by the button-hole and expound his views of life and his criticisms on things in general. His remarks are often so admirable that we prefer the interpolations to the main current of narrative. Whether this plan is the best must depend upon the idiosyncrasy of the author ; but it goes some way to explain one problem, over which Scott puzzles himself—namely, why Fielding's plays are so inferior to his novels. There are other reasons, external and internal ; but it is at least clear that a man who can never retire behind his puppets is not in the dramatic frame of mind. He is always lecturing where a dramatist must be content to pull the wires. Shakespeare is really as much present in his plays as Fielding in his novels ; but he does not let us know it ; whereas the excellent Fielding seems to be quite incapable of hiding his broad shoulders and lofty stature behind his little puppet-show.

There are, of course, actors in Fielding's world who can be trusted to speak for themselves. Tom Jones, at any rate, who is Fielding in his youth, or Captain Booth, who is the Fielding of later years, are drawn from within. Their creator's sympathy is so close and spontaneous that he has no need of his formulæ and precedents. But elsewhere he betrays his method by his desire to produce his authority. You will find the explanation of a certain line of conduct,

he says, in 'human nature, page almost the last.' He is a little too fond of taking down that volume with a flourish; of exhibiting his familiarity with its pages, and referring to the passages which justify his assertions. Fielding has an odd touch of the pedant. He is fond of airing his classical knowledge; and he is equally fond of quoting this imaginary code which he has had to study so thoroughly and painfully. The effect, however, is to give an air of artificiality to some of his minor characters. They show the traces of deliberate composition too distinctly, though the blemish may be forgiven in consideration of the genuine force and freshness of his thinking. If manufactured articles, they are not second-hand manufactures. His knowledge, unlike that of the good Parson Adams, comes from life, not books.

The worldly wisdom for which Fielding is so conspicuous had indeed been gathered in doubtful places, and shows traces of its origin. He had been forced, as he said, to choose between the positions of a hackney coachman and of a hackney writer. 'His genius,' said Lady M. W. Montagu, who records the saying, 'deserves a better fate.' Whether it would have been equally fertile, if favoured by more propitious surroundings, is one of those fruitless questions which belong to the boundless history of the might-have-beens. But one fact requires to be emphasised. Fielding's critics and biographers have dwelt far too exclusively upon the uglier side of his Bohemian life. They have presented him as yielding to all the temptations which can mislead keen powers of enjoyment, when the purse is one day at the lowest ebb and the next overflowing with the profits of some lucky hit at the theatre. Those unfortunate yellow liveries which contributed to dissipate his little fortune have scandalised posterity as they scandalised his

country neighbours.[1] But it is essential to remember that the history of the Fielding of later years, of the Fielding to whom we owe the novels, is the record of a manful and persistent struggle to escape from the mire of Grub Street. During that period he was studying the law with the energy of a young student; redeeming the office of magistrate from the discredit into which it had fallen in the hands of fee-hunting predecessors; considering seriously, and making practical proposals to remedy, the evils which then made the lowest social strata a hell upon earth; sacrificing his last chances of health and life to put down with a strong hand the robbers who infested the streets of London; and clinging with affection to his wife and children. He never got fairly clear of that lamentable slough of despond into which his follies had plunged him. His moral tone lost what delicacy it had once possessed; he had not the strength which enabled Johnson to gain elevation even from the temptations which then beset the unlucky 'author by profession.' Some literary hacks of the day escaped only by selling themselves, body and soul; others sank into misery and vice, like poor Boyce, a fragment of whose poem has been preserved by Fielding, and who appears in literary history scribbling for pay in a sack arranged to represent a shirt. Fielding never let go his hold of the firm land, though he must have felt through life like one whose feet are always plunging into a hopeless quagmire. To describe him as a mere reckless Bohemian, is to overlook the main facts of his story. He was manly to the last, not in the sense in which man means animal; but with the manliness of one who struggles bravely to redeem early

[1] They were really the property not of Fielding but of the once famous '*beau* Fielding.' See 'Dictionary of National Biography.'

errors, and who knows the value of independence, purity, and domestic affection. The scanty anecdotes which do duty for his biography reveal little of his true life. We know indeed, from a spiteful and obviously exaggerated story of Horace Walpole's, that he once had a very poor supper in doubtful company ; and from another anecdote, of slightly apocryphal flavour, that he once gave to 'friendship' the money which ought to have been given to the collector of rates. But really to know the man, we must go to his books.

What did Fielding learn of the world which had treated him so roughly? That the world must be composed of fools because it did not bow before his genius, or of knaves because it did not reward his honesty? Men of equal ability have drawn both those and the contradictory conclusions from experience. Human nature, as philosophers assure us, varies little from age to age ; but the pictures drawn by the best observers vary so strangely as to convince us that a portrait depends as much upon the artist as upon the sitter. One can see nothing but the baser, and another nothing but the nobler, passions. To one the world is like a masque representing the triumph of vice ; and another placidly assures us that virtue is always rewarded by peace of mind, and that even the temporary prosperity of the wicked is an illusion. On one canvas we see a few great heroes stand out from a multitude of pygmies ; on its rival, giants and dwarfs appear to have pretty much the same stature. The world is a scene of unrestrained passions impelling their puppets into collision or alliance without intelligible design ; or a scene of domestic order, where an occasional catastrophe interferes as little with ordinary lives as a comet with the solar system. Blind fate governs one world of the imagination, and beneficent Providence another.

The theories embodied in poetry vary as widely as the philosophies on which they are founded; and to philosophise is to declare the fundamental assumptions of half the wise men of the world to be transparent fallacies.

We need not here attempt to reconcile these apparent contradictions. As little need we attempt to settle Fielding's philosophy, for it resembles the snakes in Iceland. It seems to have been his opinion that philosophy is, as a rule, a fine word for humbug. That was a common conviction of his day; but his acceptance of it doubtless indicates the limits of his power. In his pages we have the shrewdest observation of man in his domestic relations; but we scarcely come into contact with man as he appears in presence of the infinite, and therefore with the deepest thoughts and loftiest imaginings of the great poets and philosophers. Fielding remains inflexibly in the regions of common-sense and every-day experience. But he has given an emphatic opinion of that part of the world which was visible to him, and it is one worth knowing. In a remarkable conversation, reported in Boswell, Burke and Johnson, two of the greatest of Fielding's contemporaries, seem to have agreed that they had found men less just and more generous than they could have imagined. People begin by judging the world from themselves, and it is therefore natural that two men of great intellectual power should have expected from their fellows a more than average adherence to settled principles. Thus Johnson and Burke discovered that reason, upon which justice depends, has less influence than a young reasoner is apt to fancy. On the other hand, they discovered that the blind instincts by which the mass is necessarily guided are not so bad as they are represented by the cynics. The Rochefoucauld or

Mandeville who passes off his smart sayings upon the public as serious, knows better than anybody that a man must be a fool to take them literally. The wisdom which he affects is very easily learnt, and is more often the product of the premature sagacity dear to youth than of a ripened judgment. Good-hearted men, at least, like Johnson and Burke, shake off cynicism whilst others are acquiring it.

Fielding's verdict seems to differ at first sight. He undoubtedly lays great stress upon the selfishness of mankind. He seldom admits of an apparently generous action without showing its alloy of selfish motive, and sometimes showing that it is a mere cloak for selfish motives. In a characteristic passage of his 'Voyage to Lisbon' he applies his theory to his own case. When the captain falls on his knees, he will not suffer a brave man and an old man to remain for a moment in that posture, but forgives him at once. He hastens, however, utterly to disclaim all praise, on the ground that his true motive was simply the convenience of forgiveness. 'If men were wiser,' he adds, 'they would be oftener influenced by that motive.' This kind of inverted hypocrisy, which may be graceful in a man's own case (for nobody will doubt that Fielding was less guided by calculation than he asserts), is not so graceful when applied to his neighbours. And perhaps some readers may hold that Fielding pitches the average strain of human motive too low. I should rather surmise that he substantially agrees with Johnson and Burke. The fact that most men attend a good deal to their own interests is one of the primary data of life. It is a thing at which we have no more right to be astonished than at the fact that even saints and martyrs have to eat and drink like other persons, or that a sound digestion is the foundation of much moral

excellence. It is one of those facts which people of a romantic turn of mind may choose to overlook, but which no honest observer of life can seriously deny. Our conduct is determined through some thirty points of the compass by our own interest; and, happily, through at least nine-and-twenty of those points is rightfully so determined. Each man is forced, by an unavoidable necessity, to look after his own and his children's bread and butter, and to spend most of his efforts on that innocent end. So long as he does not pursue his interests wrongfully, nor remain dead to other calls when they happen, there is little cause for complaint, and certainly there is none for surprise.

Fielding recognises, but never exaggerates, this homely truth. He has a hearty and generous belief in the reality of good impulses, and the existence of thoroughly unselfish men. The main actors in his world are not, as in Balzac's, mere hideous incarnations of selfishness. The superior sanity of his mind keeps him from nightmares, if its calmness is unfavourable to lofty visions. With Balzac, women like Lady Bellaston become the rule instead of the exception, and their evil passions are the dominant forces in society. Fielding, though he recognises their existence, tells us plainly that they are exceptional. Society, he says, is as moral as ever it was, and given more to frivolity than to vice [1]—a statement judiciously overlooked by some of the critics who want to make graphic history out of his novels. Fielding's mind had gathered coarseness, but it had not been poisoned. He sees how many ugly things are covered by the superficial gloss of fashion, but he does not condescend to travesty the facts in order to gratify a morbid taste for the horrible. When he wants a good man or

[1] See 'Tom Jones,' book xiv. chap. i.

woman he knows where to find them, and paints from Allen or his own wife with obvious sincerity and hearty sympathy. He is less anxious to exhibit human selfishness than to show us that an alloy of generosity is to be found even amidst base motives. Some of his happiest touches are illustrations of this doctrine. His villains (with a significant exception) are never monsters. They have some touch of human emotion. No desert, according to him, is so bare but that some sweet spring blends with its brackish waters. His grasping landladies have genuine movements of sympathy ; and even the scoundrelly Black George, the gamekeeper, is anxious to do Tom Jones a good turn, without risk, of course, to his own comfort, by way of compensation for previous injuries. It is this impartial insight into the ordinary texture of human motive that gives a certain solidity and veracity to Fielding's work. We are always made to feel that the actions spring fairly and naturally from the character of his persons, not from the exigencies of his story or the desire to be effective. The one great difficulty in 'Tom Jones' is the assumption that the excellent Allworthy should have been deceived for years by the hypocrite Blifil, and blind to the substantial kindliness of his ward. Here we may fancy that Fielding has been forced to be unnatural by his plot. Yet he suggests a satisfactory solution with admirable skill. Allworthy is prejudiced in favour of Blifil by the apparently unjust prejudice of Blifil's mother in favour of the jovial Tom. A generous man may easily become blind to the faults of a supposed victim of maternal injustice ; and even here Fielding fairly escapes from the blame due to ordinary novelists, who invent impossible misunderstandings in order to bring about intricate perplexities.

Blifil is perhaps the one case (for 'Jonathan Wild' is a satire, not a history, or, as M. Taine fancies, a tract) in which Fielding seems to lose his unvarying coolness of judgment ; and the explanation is obvious. The one fault to which he is, so to speak, unjust, is hypocrisy. Hypocrisy, indeed, cannot well be painted too black, but it should not be made impossible. When Fielding has to deal with such a character, he for once loses his self-command, and, like inferior writers, begins to be angry with his creatures. Instead of analysing and explaining, he simply reviles and leaves us in presence of a moral anomaly. Blifil is not more wicked than Iago, but we seem to understand the psychical chemistry by which an Iago is compounded ; whereas Blifil can only be regarded as a devil (if the word be not too dignified) who does not really belong to this world at all. The error, though characteristic of a man whose great intellectual merit is his firm grasp of realities, and whose favourite virtue is his downright sincerity, is not the less a blemish. Hatred of pedantry too easily leads to hatred of culture, and hatred of hypocrisy to distrust of the more exalted virtues. Fielding cannot be just to motives lying rather outside his ordinary sphere of thought. He can mock heartily and pleasantly enough at the affectation of philosophy, as in the case where Parson Adams, urging poor Joseph Andrews, by considerations drawn from the Bible and from Seneca, to be ready to resign his Fanny 'peaceably, quietly, and contentedly,' suddenly hears of the supposed loss of his own little child, and is called upon to act instead of preaching. But his satire upon all characters and creeds which embody the more exalted strains of feeling is apt to be indiscriminate. A High Churchman, according to him, is a Pharisee who prefers orthodoxy to

virtue ; a Methodist a mere mountebank, who counterfeits spiritual raptures to impose upon dupes ; a Freethinker is a man who weaves a mask of fine phrases, under which to cover his aversion to the restraints of religion. Fielding's religion consists chiefly of a solid homespun morality, and he is more suspicious of an excessive than of a defective zeal. Similarly he is a hearty Whig, but no revolutionist. He has as hearty a contempt for the cant about liberty [1] as Dr. Johnson himself, and has very stringent remedies to propose for regulating the mob. The bailiff in 'Amelia,' who, whilst he brutally maltreats the unlucky prisoners for debt, swaggers about the British Constitution, and swears that he is 'all for liberty,' recalls the boatman who ridiculed French slavery to Voltaire, and was carried off next day by a pressgang. Fielding, indeed, is no fanatical adherent of our blessed Constitution, which, as he says, has been pronounced by some of our wisest men to be too perfect to be altered in any particular, and which a number of the said wisest men have been mending ever since. He hates cant on all sides impartially, though, as a sound Whig, he specially hates Papists and Jacobites as the most offensive of all Pharisees, marked for detestation by their taste for frogs and French wine in preference to punch and roast beef. He is a patriotic Briton, whose patriotism takes the genuine shape of a hearty growl at English abuses, with a tacit assumption that things are worse elsewhere.

The reflection of this quality of solid good sense, absolutely scorning any ailment except that of solid facts, is the so-called realism of Fielding's novels. He is, indeed, as

[1] See 'Voyage to Lisbon' (July 21) for some very good remarks upon this word, which, as he says, no two men understand in the same sense.

hearty a realist as Hogarth, whose congenial art he is never tired of praising with all the cordiality of his nature, and to whom he refers his readers for portraits of several characters in 'Tom Jones.' His scenery is as realistic as a photograph. Tavern kitchens, sponging-house parlours, the back-slums of London streets, are drawn from the realities with unflinching vigour. We see the stains of beer-pots and smell the fumes of stale tobacco as distinctly as in Hogarth's engravings. He shrinks neither from the coarse nor the absolutely disgusting. It is enough to recall the female boxing or scratching matches which are so frequent in his pages. On one such occasion his language seems to imply that he had watched such battles in the spirit of a connoisseur in our own day watching less inexpressibly disgusting prize-fights. Certainly we could wish that, if such scenes were to be depicted, there might have been a clearer proof that the artist had a nose and eyes capable of feeling offence.

But the nickname 'realist' slides easily into another sense. The realist is sometimes supposed to be more shallow as well as more prosaic than the idealist; to be content with the outside where the idealist pierces to the heart. He gives the bare fact, where his rival gives the idea symbolised by the fact, and therefore rendering it attractive to the higher intellect. Fielding's view of his own art is instructive in this as in other matters. Poetic invention, he says, is generally taken to be a creative faculty; and if so, it is the peculiar property of the romance-writers, who frankly take leave of the actual and possible. Fielding disavows all claim to this faculty; he writes histories, not romances. But, in his sense, poetic invention means, not creation, but 'discovery;' that is, 'a quick,

sagacious penetration into the true essence of all objects of our contemplation.' Perhaps we may say that it is chiefly a question of method whether a writer should portray men or angels—the beings, that is, of everyday life—or beings placed under a totally different set of circumstances. The more vital question is whether, by one method or the other, he shows us a man's heart or only his clothes; whether he appeals to our intellects or imaginations, or amuses us by images which do not sink below the eye. In scientific writings a man may give us the true law of a phenomenon, whether he exemplifies it in extreme or average cases, in the orbit of a comet or the fall of an apple. The romance writer should show us what real men would be in dreamland, the writer of 'histories' what they are on the knifeboard of an omnibus. True insight may be shown in either case, or may be absent in either, according as the artist deals with the deepest organic laws or the more external accidents. The 'Ancient Mariner' is an embodiment of certain simple emotional phases and moral laws amidst the phantasmagoric incidents of a dream, and De Foe does not interpret them better because he confines himself to the most prosaic incidents. When romance becomes really arbitrary, and is parted from all basis of observation, it loses its true interest and deserves Fielding's condemnation. Fielding conscientiously aims at discharging the highest function. He describes, as he says in 'Joseph Andrews,' 'not men, but manners; not an individual, but a species.' His lawyer, he tells us, has been alive for the last four thousand years, and will probably survive four thousand more. Mrs. Tow-wouse lives wherever turbulent temper, avarice, and insensibility are united; and her sneaking husband wherever a good inclination has

glimmered forth, eclipsed by poverty of spirit and understanding. But the type which shows best the force and the limits of Fielding's genius is Parson Adams. He belongs to a distinguished family, whose members have been portrayed by the greatest historians. He is a collateral descendant of Don Quixote, for whose creation Fielding felt a reverence exceeded only by his reverence for Shakespeare.[1] The resemblance is, of course, distant, and consists chiefly in this, that the parson, like the knight, lives in an ideal world, and is constantly shocked by harsh collision with facts. He believes in his sermons instead of his sword, and his imagination is tenanted by virtuous squires and model parsons instead of Arcadian shepherds, or knight-errants and fair ladies. His imagination is not exalted beyond the limits of sanity, but only colours the prosaic realities in

[1] In his interesting Life of Godwin, Mr. Paul claims for his hero (I dare say rightly) that he was the first English writer to give a 'lengthy and appreciative notice' of 'Don Quixote.' But when he infers that Godwin was also the first English writer who recognised in Cervantes a great humorist, satirist, moralist, and artist, he seems to me to overlook Fielding and others. So Warton in his essay on 'Pope' calls 'Don Quixote' the 'most original and unrivalled work of modern times.' The book must have been popular in England from its publication, as we know from the preface to Beaumont and Fletcher's 'Knight of the Burning Castle;' and numerous translations and imitations show that Cervantes was always enjoyed, if not criticised. Fielding's frequent references to 'Don Quixote' (to say nothing of his play, 'Don Quixote in England') imply an admiration fully as warm as that of Godwin. 'Don Quixote,' says Fielding, is more worthy the name of history than Mariana, and he always speaks of Cervantes in the tone of an affectionate disciple. Fielding, I will add, seems to me to have admired Shakespeare more heartily and intelligently than ninety-nine out of a hundred modern supporters of Shakespeare societies; though these gentlemen are never happier than when depreciating English eighteenth-century critics to exalt vapid German philosophising. Fielding's favourite play seems from his quotations to have been 'Othello.'

accordance with the impulses of a tranquil benevolence. If the theme be fundamentally similar, it is treated with a far less daring hand.

Adams is much more closely related to Sir Roger de Coverley, the Vicar of Wakefield, or Uncle Toby. Each of these lovable beings invites us at once to sympathise with and to smile at the unaffected simplicity which, seeing no evil, becomes half ludicrous and half pathetic in this corrupt world. Adams stands out from his brethren by his intense reality. If he smells too distinctly of beer and tobacco, we believe in him more firmly than in the less full-blooded creations of Sterne and Goldsmith. Parson Adams, indeed, has a startling vigour of organisation. Not merely the hero of a modern ritualist novel, but Amyas Leigh or Guy Livingstone himself, might have been amazed at his athletic prowess. He stalks ahead of the stage-coach (favoured doubtless by the bad roads of the period) as though he had accepted the modern principle about fearing God and walking a thousand miles in a thousand hours. His mutton fist and the crabtree cudgel which swings so freely round his clerical head would have daunted the contemporary gladiators, Slack and Broughton. He shows his Christian humility not merely by familiarity with his poorest parishioners, but in sitting up whole nights in tavern kitchens, drinking unlimited beer, smoking inextinguishable pipes, and revelling in a ceaseless flow of gossip. We smile at the good man's intense delight in a love-story, at the simplicity which makes him see a good Samaritan in Parson Trulliber, at the absence of mind which makes him pitch his Æschylus into the fire, or walk a dozen miles in profound oblivion of the animal which should have been between his knees; but his contemporaries were provoked to a horse-laugh, and

when we remark the tremendous practical jokes which his innocence suggests to them, we admit that he requires his whole athletic vigour to bring so tender a heart safely through so rough a world.

If the ideal hero is always to live in fancy-land and talk in blank verse, Adams has clearly no right to the title ; nor, indeed, has Don Quixote. But the masculine portraiture of the coarse realities is not only indicative of intellectual vigour, but artistically appropriate. The contrast between the world and its simple-minded inhabitant is the more forcible in proportion to the firmness and solidity of Fielding's touch. Uncle Toby proves that Sterne had preserved enough tenderness to make an exquisite plaything of his emotions. The Vicar of Wakefield proves that Goldsmith had preserved a childlike innocence of imagination, and could retire from duns and publishers to an idyllic world of his own. Joseph Andrews proves that Fielding was neither a child nor a sentimentalist, but that he had learnt to face facts as they are, and set a true value on the best elements of human life. In the midst of vanity and vexation of spirit he could find some comfort in pure and strong domestic affection. He can indulge his feelings without introducing the false note of sentimentalism, or condescending to tone his pictures with rose-colour. He wants no illusions. The exemplary Dr. Harrison in 'Amelia' held no action unworthy of him which could protect an innocent person or 'bring a rogue to the gallows.' Good Parson Adams could lay his cudgel on the back of a villain with hearty goodwill. He believes too easily in human goodness, but there is not a maudlin fibre in his whole body. He would not be the man to cry over a dead donkey whilst children are in want of bread. He would be slower than

the excellent Dr. Primrose to believe in the reformation of a villain by fine phrases, and if he fell into such a weakness, his biographer would not, like Goldsmith, be inclined to sanction the error. A villain is induced to reform, indeed, by the sight of Amelia's excellence, but Fielding is careful to tell us that the change was illusory, and that the villain ended on a gallows. We are made sensible that if Adams had his fancies they were foibles, and therefore sources of misfortune. We are to admire the childlike character, but not to share its illusions. The world is not made of moonshine. Hypocrisy, cruelty, avarice, and lust have to be stamped out by hard blows, not cured by delicate infusion of graceful sentimentalisms.

So far Fielding's portrait of an ideal character is all the better for his masculine grasp of fact. It must, however, be admitted that he fails a little on the other side of the contrast. He believes in a good heart, but scarcely in very lofty motive. He tells us in 'Tom Jones'[1] that he has painted no perfect character, because he never happened to meet one. His stories, like 'Vanity Fair,' may be described as novels without a hero. It is not merely that his characters are imperfect, but that they are deficient in the finer ingredients which go to make up the nearest approximations of our imperfect natures to heroism. Colonel Newcome was not perhaps so good a man as Parson Adams, but he had a certain delicacy of sentiment which led him, as we may remember, to be rather hard upon Tom Jones, and which Fielding (as may be gathered from Bath in 'Amelia') would have been inclined to ridicule. Parson Adams is simple enough to become a laughing-stock to the brutal, but he

[1] Book x. chap. i.

never consciously rebels against the dictates of the plainest common-sense. His theology comes from Tillotson and Hoadly ; he has no eye for the romantic side of his creed, and would be apt to condemn a mystic as simply a fool. His loftiest aspiration is not to reform the world or any part of it, but to get a modest bit of preferment (he actually receives it, we are happy to think, in 'Amelia'), enough to pay for his tobacco and his children's schooling. Fielding's dislike to the romantic makes him rather blind to the elevated. He will not only start from the actual, but does not conceive the possibility of an infusion of loftier principles. The existing standard of sound sense prescribes an impassable limit to his imagination. Parson Adams is an admirable incarnation of certain excellent and honest impulses. He sets forth the wisdom of the heart and the beauty of the simple instincts of an affectionate nature. But we are forced to admit that he is not the highest type conceivable, and might, for example, learn something from his less robust colleague Dr. Primrose.

This remark suggests the common criticism, expounded with his usual brilliancy by M. Taine. Fielding, he tells us, loves nature, but he does not love it 'like the great impartial artists, Shakespeare and Goethe.' He moralises incessantly—which is wrong. Moreover, his morality appears to be very questionable. It consists in preferring instinct to reason. The hero is the man who is born generous as a dog is born affectionate. And this, says M. Taine, might be all very well were it not for a great omission. Fielding has painted nature, but nature without refinement, poetry, and chivalry. He can only describe the impetuosity of the senses, not the nervous exaltation and the poetic rapture. Man is with him 'a good buffalo ; and perhaps

he is the hero required by a people which is itself called John Bull.' In all which there is an undoubted vein of truth. Fielding's want of refinement, for example, is one of those undeniable facts which must be taken for granted. But, without seeking to set right some other statements implied in M. Taine's judgment, it is worth while to consider a little more fully the moral aspect of Fielding's work. Much has been said upon this point by some who, with M. Taine, take Fielding for a mere 'buffalo,' and by others who, like Coleridge—a safer and more sympathetic critic—hold 'Tom Jones' to be, on the whole, a sound exposition of healthy morality.

Fielding, on the 'buffalo' view, is supposed to be simply taking one side in one of those perpetual controversies which has occupied many generations and never approaches a settlement. He prefers nature to law, instinct to reasoned action; he is on the side of Charles as against Joseph Surface; he admires the publican, and condemns the Pharisee without reserve; he loves the man who is nobody's enemy but his own, and despises the prudent person whose charity ends at his own doorstep. Such a doctrine—so absolutely stated—is rather a negation of all morality than a lax morality. If it implies a love of generous instincts, it denies that a man should have any regard for moral rules, which are needed precisely in order to control our spontaneous instincts. Virtue is amiable, but ceases to be meritorious. Nothing would be easier than to quote passages in which Fielding expressly repudiates such a theory; but, of course, a writer's morality must be judged by the conceptions embodied in his work, not by the maxims scattered through it. Nor, for the same reason, can we pay much attention to Fielding's express assertion that he is

writing in the interests of virtue ; for Smollett, and less scrupulous writers than Smollett, have found their account in similar protestations. Yet anybody, I think, who will compare 'Joseph Andrews' with that intentionally most moral work, 'Pamela,' will admit that Fielding's morality goes deeper than this. Fielding at least makes us love virtue, and is incapable of the solecism which Richardson commits in substantially preaching that virtue means standing out for a higher price. That Fielding's reckless heroes have a genuine sensibility to the claims of virtue, appears still more unmistakably when we compare them with the heartless fine gentlemen of the Congreve school and of his own early plays, or put the faulty Captain Booth beside such an unredeemed scamp as Peregrine Pickle.

It is clear, in short, that the aim of Fielding (whether he succeeds or not) is the very reverse of that attributed to him by M. Taine. 'Tom Jones' and 'Amelia' have, ostensibly at least, a most emphatic moral attached to them ; and not only attached to them, but borne in mind and even too elaborately preached throughout. That moral is the one which Fielding had learnt in the school of his own experience. It is the moral that dissipation bears fruit in misery. The remorse, it is true, which was generated in Fielding and in his heroes was not the remorse which drives a man to a cloister, or which even seriously poisons his happiness. The offences against morality are condoned too easily, and the line between vice and virtue drawn in accordance with certain distinctions which even Parson Adams could scarcely have approved. Vice, he seems to say, is altogether objectionable only when complicated by cruelty or hypocrisy. But if Fielding's moral sense is not very delicate, it is vigorous. He hates most heartily what

he sees to be wrong, though his sight might easily be improved in delicacy of discrimination. The truth is simply that Fielding accepted that moral code which the better men of the world in his time really acknowledged, as distinguished from that by which they affected to be bound. That so wide a distinction should generally exist between these codes is a matter for deep regret. That Fielding in his hatred for humbug should have condemned purity as puritanical is clearly lamentable. The confusion, however, was part of the man, and, as already noticed, shows itself in one shape or other throughout his work. But it would be unjust to condemn him upon that ground as antagonistic or indifferent to reasonable morality. His morality is at the superior antipodes from the cynicism of a Wycherley ; and far superior to the prurient sentimentalism of Sterne or the hot-pressed priggishness of Richardson, or even the reckless Bohemianism of Smollett.

There is a deeper question, however, beneath this discussion. The morality of those 'great impartial artists' of whom M. Taine speaks differs from Fielding's in a more serious sense. The highest morality of a great work of art depends upon the power with which the essential beauty and ugliness of virtue and vice are exhibited by an impartial observer. The morality, for example, of Goethe and Shakespeare appears in the presentation of such characters as Iago and Mephistopheles. The insight of true genius shows us by such examples what is the true physiology of vice ; what is the nature of the man who has lost all faith in virtue and all sympathy with purity and nobility of character. The artist of inferior rank tries to make us hate vice by showing that it comes to a bad end precisely because he has an adequate perception of its true nature.

He can see that a drunkard generally gets into debt or incurs an attack of *delirium tremens*, but he does not exhibit the moral disintegration which is the underlying cause of the misfortune, and which may be equally fatal, even if it happens to evade the penalty. The distinction depends upon the power of the artist to fulfil Fielding's requirement of penetrating to the essence of the objects of his contemplation. It corresponds to the distinction in philosophy between a merely prudential system of ethics—the system of the gallows and the gaol—and the system which recognises the deeper issues perceptible to a fine moral sense.

Now, in certain matters, Fielding's morality is of the merely prudential kind. It resembles Hogarth's simple doctrine that the good apprentice will be Lord Mayor and the bad apprentice get into Newgate. So shrewd an observer was indeed well aware, and could say very forcibly,[1] that virtue in this world might sometimes lead to poverty, contempt, and imprisonment. He does not, like some novelists, assume the character of a temporal Providence, and knock his evildoers on the head at the end of the story. He shows very forcibly that the difficulties which beset poor Jones and Booth are not to be fairly called accidents, but are the difficulties to which bad conduct generally leads a man, and which are all the harder when not counterbalanced by a clear conscience. He can even describe with sympathy such a character as poor Atkinson in 'Amelia,' whose unselfish love brings him more blows than favours of fortune. But it is true that he is a good deal more sensible to what are called the prudential sanctions of virtue, at least of a certain category of virtues, than to its essential beauty.

[1] 'Tom Jones,' book xv. chap. i.

So far the want of refinement of which M. Taine speaks does, in fact, lower, and lower very materially, his moral perception. A man of true delicacy could never have dragged Tom Jones into his lowest degradation without showing more forcibly his abhorrence of his loose conduct. This is, as Colonel Newcome properly points out, the great and obvious blot upon the story, which no critics have missed, and we cannot even follow the leniency of Coleridge, who thinks that a single passage introduced to express Fielding's real judgment would have remedied the mischief. It is too obvious to be denied without sophistry that Tom, though he has many good feelings, and can preach very edifying sermons to his less scrupulous friend Nightingale, requires to be cast in a different mould. His whole character should have been strung to a higher pitch to make us feel that such degradation would not merely have required punishment to restore his self-complacency, but have left a craving for some thorough moral ablution.

Granting unreservedly all that may be urged upon this point, we may still agree with the judgment pronounced by the most congenial critics. Fielding's pages reek too strongly of tobacco ; they are apt to turn delicate stomachs ; but the atmosphere is, on the whole, healthy and bracing. No man can read them without prejudice and fail to recognise the fact that he has been in contact with something much higher than a 'good buffalo.' He has learnt to know a man, not merely full of animal vigour, not merely stored with various experience of men and manners, but also in the main sound and unpoisoned by the mephitic vapours which poisoned the atmosphere of his police office. If the scorn of hypocrisy is too fully emphasised, and the sensitiveness to ugly and revolting objects too much deadened

by a rough life, yet nobody could be more heartily convinced of the beauty and value of those solid domestic instincts on which human happiness must chiefly depend. Put Fielding beside the modern would-be satirists who make society — especially French society [1] — a mere sink of nastiness, or beside the more virtuous persons whose favourite affectation is simplicity, and who labour most spasmodically to be masculine, and his native vigour, his massive common-sense, his wholesome views of men and manners, stand out in solid relief. Certainly he was limited in perception, and not so elevated in tone as might be desired; but he is a fitting representative of the stalwart vigour and the intellectual shrewdness evident in the best men of his time. The English domestic life of the period was certainly far from blameless, and anything but refined; but if we have gained in some ways, we are hardly entitled to look with unqualified disdain upon the rough vigour of our beer-drinking, beef-eating ancestors.

We have felt, indeed, the limitations of Fielding's art more clearly since English fiction found a new starting-point in Scott. Scott made us sensible of many sources of interest to which Fielding was naturally blind. He showed us especially that a human being belonged to a society going through a long course of historical development, and renewed the bonds with the past which had been rudely snapped in Fielding's period. Fielding only deals, it may be roughly said, with men as members of a little family circle, whereas Scott shows them as members of a nation rich in old historical traditions, related to the past and the future, and to the external nature in which it has been

[1] For Fielding's view of the French novels of his day see 'Tom Jones,' book xiii. chap. ix.

developed. A wider set of forces is introduced into our conception of humanity, and the romantic element, which Fielding ignored, comes again to life. Scott, too, was a greater man than Fielding, of wider sympathy, loftier character, and, not the least, with an incomparably keener ear for the voices of the mountains, the sea, and the sky. The more Scott is studied, the higher, I believe, the opinion that we shall form of some of his powers. But in one respect Fielding is his superior. It is a kind of misnomer which classifies all Scott's books as novels. They are embodied legends and traditions, descriptions of men, and races, and epochs of history ; but many of them are novels, as it were, by accident, and modern readers are often disappointed because the name suggests misleading associations. They expect to sympathise with Scott's heroes, whereas the heroes are generally dropped in from without, just to give ostensible continuity to the narrative. The apparent accessories are really the main substance. The Jacobites and not Waverley, the Borderers, not Mr. Van Beest Brown, the Covenanters, not Morton or Lord Evandale, are the real subject of Scott's best romances. Now Fielding is really a novelist in the more natural sense. We are interested, that is, by the main characters, though they are not always the most attractive in themselves. We are really absorbed by the play of their passions and the conflict of their motives, and not merely taking advantage of the company to see the surrounding scenery or phases of social life. In this sense Fielding's art is admirable, and surpassed that of all his English predecessors as of most of his successors. If the light is concentrated in a narrow focus, it is still healthy daylight. So long as we do not wish to leave his circle of ideas, we see little fault in the vigour with

which he fulfils his intention. And therefore, whatever Fielding's other faults, he is beyond comparison the most faithful and profound mouthpiece of the passions and failings of a society which seems at once strangely remote and yet strangely near to us. When seeking to solve that curious problem which is discussed in one of Hazlitt's best essays—what characters one would most like to have met?—and running over the various claims of a meeting at the Mermaid with Shakespeare and Jonson, a 'neat repast of Attic taste' with Milton, a gossip at Button's with Addison and Steele, a club-dinner with Johnson and Burke, a supper with Lamb, or (certainly the least attractive) an evening at Holland House, I sometimes fancy that, after all, few things would be pleasanter than a pipe and a bowl of punch with Fielding and Hogarth. It is true that for such a purpose I provide myself in imagination with a new set of sturdy nerves, and with a digestion such as that which was once equal to the horrors of an undergraduates' 'wine party.' But having made that trifling assumption, I fancy that there would be few places where one would hear more good motherwit, shrewder judgments of men and things, or a sounder appreciation of those homely elements of which human life is in fact chiefly composed. Common-sense in the highest degree—whether we choose to identify it or contrast it with genius—is at least one of the most enduring and valuable of qualities in literature as everywhere else; and Fielding is one of its best representatives. But perhaps one is unduly biassed by the charm of a complete escape in imagination from the thousand and one affectations which have grown up since Fielding died and we have all become so much wiser and more learned than all previous generations.

COWPER AND ROUSSEAU

SAINTE-BEUVE'S Essay on Cowper—considered as the type of domestic poets—has recently been translated for the benefit of English readers. It is interesting to know on the highest authority what are the qualities which may recommend a writer, so strongly tinged by local prejudices, to the admiration of a different race and generation. The gulf which separates the Olney of a century back from modern Paris is wide enough to give additional value to the generous appreciation of the critic. I have not the presumption to supplement or correct any part of his judgment. It is enough to remark briefly that Cowper's immediate popularity was, as is usually the case, due in part to qualities which have little to do with his more enduring reputation. Sainte-Beuve dwells with special fondness upon his pictures of domestic and rural life. He notices, of course, the marvellous keenness of his pathetic poems ; and he touches, though with some hint that national affinity is necessary to its full appreciation, upon the playful humour which immortalised John Gilpin, and lights up the poet's most charming letters. Something, perhaps, might still be said by a competent critic upon the singular charm of Cowper's best style. A poet, for example, might perhaps tell us, though a prosaic person cannot, what is the secret of the impression made by such a poem as the 'Wreck of the Royal George.'

Given an ordinary newspaper paragraph about wreck or battle, turn it into the simplest possible language, do not introduce a single metaphor or figure of speech, indulge in none but the most obvious of all reflections—as, for example, that when a man is once drowned he won't win any more battles—and produce as the result a copy of verses which nobody can ever read without instantly knowing them by heart. How Cowper managed to perform such a feat, and why not one poet even in a hundred can perform it, are questions which might lead to some curious critical speculation.

The qualities, however, which charm the purely literary critic do not account for the whole of Cowper's influence. A great part of his immediate, and some part of his more enduring, success, have been clearly owing to a different cause. On reading Johnson's 'Lives,' Cowper remarked, rather uncharitably, that there was scarcely one good man amongst the poets. Few poets, indeed, shared those religious views which commended him more than any literary excellence to a large class of readers. Religious poetry is generally popular out of all proportion to its æsthetic merits. Young was but a second-rate Pope in point of talent; but probably the 'Night Thoughts' have been studied by a dozen people for one who has read the 'Essay on Man' or the 'Imitations of Horace.' In our own day, nobody, I suppose, would hold that the popularity of the 'Christian Year' has been strictly proportioned to its poetical excellence; and Cowper's vein of religious meditation has recommended him to thousands who, if biassed at all, were quite unconsciously biassed by the admirable qualities which endeared him to such a critic as Sainte-Beuve. His own view was frequently and unequivocally expressed.

He says over and over again—and his entire sincerity lifts him above all suspicion of the affected self-depreciation of other writers—that he looked upon his poetical work as at best innocent trifling, except so far as his poems were versified sermons. His intention was everywhere didactic—sometimes annoyingly didactic—and his highest ambition was to be a useful auxiliary to the prosaic exhortations of Doddridge, Watts, or his friend Newton. His religion, said some people, drove him mad. Even a generous critic like Mr. Stopford Brooke cannot refrain from hinting that his madness was in some part due to the detested influence of Calvinism. In fact, it may be admitted that Newton—who is half inclined to boast that he has a name for driving people mad—scarcely showed his judgment in setting a man who had already been in confinement to write hymns which at times are the embodiment of despair. But it is obviously contrary to the plainest facts to say that Cowper was driven mad by his creed. His first attack preceded his religious enthusiasm; and a gentleman who tries to hang himself because he has received a comfortable appointment for life, is in a state of mind which may be explained without reference to his theological views. It would be truer to say that when Cowper's intellect was once unhinged, he found a congenial expression for the tortures of his soul in the imagery provided by the sternest of Christian sects. But neither can this circumstance be alleged as in itself disparaging to the doctrines thus misapplied. A religious belief which does not provide language for the darkest moods of the human mind, for profound melancholy, torturing remorse and gloomy foreboding, is a religion not calculated to lay a powerful grasp upon the imaginations of mankind. Had Cowper been a Roman Catholic, the same

anguish of mind might have driven him to seek relief in the recesses of some austere monastery. Had he, like Rousseau, been a theoretical optimist, he would, like Rousseau, have tortured himself with the conflict between theory and fact—between the world as it might be and the corrupt and tyrannous world as it is—and have held that all men were in a conspiracy to rob him of his peace. The chief article of Rousseau's rather hazy creed was the duty of universal philanthropy, and Rousseau fancied himself to be the object of all men's hatred. Similarly, Cowper, who held that the first duty of man was the love of God, fancied that some mysterious cause had made him the object of the irrevocable hatred of his Creator. With such fancies, reason and creeds which embody reason have nothing to do except to give shape to the instruments of self-torture. The cause of the misery is the mind diseased. You can no more raze out its rooted troubles by arguing against the reality of the phantoms which it generates than cure any other delirium by the most irrefragable logic.

Sainte-Beuve makes some remarks upon this analogy between Rousseau and Cowper. The comparison suggests some curious considerations as to the contrast and likeness of the two cases represented. Some personal differences are, of course, profound and obvious. Cowper was as indisputably the most virtuous man, as Rousseau the greatest intellectual power. Cowper's domestic life was as beautiful as Rousseau's was repulsive. Rousseau, moreover, was more decidedly a sentimentalist than Cowper, if by sentimentalism we mean that disposition which makes a luxury of grief, and delights in poring over its own morbid emotions. Cowper's tears are always wrung from him by intense anguish of soul, and never, as is occasionally the

case with Rousseau, suggest that the weeper is proud of his excessive tenderness. Nevertheless, it is probably true, as Mr. Lowell says, that Cowper is the nearest congener of Rousseau in our language. The two men, of course, occupy in one respect an analogous literary position. We habitually assign to Cowper an important place—though of course a subordinate place to Rousseau—in bringing about the reaction against the eighteenth-century code of taste and morality. In each case it would generally be said that the change indicated was a return to nature and passion from the artificial coldness of the dominant school. That reaction, whatever its precise nature, took characteristically different forms in England and in France; and it is as illustrating one of the most important distinctions that I propose to say a few words upon the contrast thus exhibited.

Return to nature! That was the war-cry which animated the Lake school in their assault upon the then established authority. Pope, as they held, had tied the hands of English poets by his jingling metres and frigid conventionalities. The muse—to make use of the old-fashioned phrase—had been rouged and bewigged, and put into high-heeled boots, till she had lost the old majestic freedom of gait and energy of action. Let us go back to our ancient school, to Milton and Shakespeare and Spenser and Chaucer, and break the ignoble fetters imported from the pseudo-classicists of France. These and similar phrases, repeated and varied in a thousand forms, have become part of the stock-in-trade of literary historians, and are put forward so fluently that we sometimes forget to ask what it is precisely that they mean. Down to Milton, it is assumed, we were natural; then we became artificial; and with the Revolution we became natural again. That a theory so

generally received and so consciously adopted by the leaders of the new movement must have in it a considerable amount of truth is not to be disputed. But it is sometimes not easy to interpret it into very plain language. The method of explaining great intellectual and social movements by the phrase 'reaction' is a very tempting one, for the simple reason that it enables us to effect a great saving of thought. The change is made to explain itself. History becomes a record of oscillations; we are always swinging backwards and forwards, pendulum fashion, from one extreme to another. The courtiers of Charles II. were too dissolute because the Puritans were too strict; Addison and Steele were respectable because Congreve and Wycherley were licentious; Wesley was zealous because the Church had become indifferent; the Revolution of 1789 was a reaction against the manners of the last century, and the Revolution in running its course set up a reaction against itself. Now it is easy enough to admit that there is some truth in this theory. Every great man who moves his race profoundly is of necessity protesting against the worst evils of the time, and it is as true as a copy-book that zeal leads to extremes, and one extreme to its opposite. A river flowing through a nearly level plain turns its concavity alternately to the east and west, and we may fairly explain each bend by the fact that the previous bend was in the opposite direction. But that does not explain why the river flows down-hill, nor show which direction tends downwards. We may account for trifling oscillations, not for the main current. Nor does it seem at first a self-evident proposition that vice, for example, necessarily generates over-strictness. A man is not always a Pharisee because his father has been a sinner. In fact, the people who talk so fluently about reaction fall

back whenever it suits them upon the inverse theory. If a process happens to be continuous, the reason is as simple and satisfactory as in the opposite case. A man is dissolute, they will tell us, because his father was dissolute; just as they will tell us, in the opposite case, that he was dissolute because his father was strict. Obviously, the mere statement of a reaction is not by itself satisfactory. We want to know why there should have been a reaction; why the code or morals which satisfied one generation did not satisfy its successors; why the coming man was repelled rather than attracted; what it was that made Pope array himself in a wig instead of appreciating the noble freedom of his predecessors; and why, again, at a given period men became tired of the old wig business. When we have solved, or approximated to a solution of, that problem, we shall generally find, I suspect, that the action and reaction are generally more superficial phenomena than we suppose, and that the great processes of evolution are going on beneath the surface comparatively undisturbed by the changes which first attract our notice. Every man naturally exaggerates the share of his education due to himself. He fancies that he has made a wonderful improvement upon his father's views, perhaps by reversing the improvement made by the father on the grandfather's. He does not see, what is plain enough to a more distant generation, that in reality each generation is most closely bound to its nearest predecessors.

There is, too, a special source of ambiguity in the catchword used by the revolutionary school. They spoke of a return to nature. What, to ask once more a very troublesome question, is meant by nature? Does it mean inanimate nature? If so, is a love of nature clearly good or 'natural'?

Was Wordsworth justifiable *primâ facie* for telling us to study mountains rather than Pope for announcing that

> The proper study of mankind is man?

Is it not more natural to be interested in men than in mountains? Does nature include man in his natural state? If so, what is the natural state of man? Is the savage the man of nature, or the unsophisticated peasant, or the man whose natural powers are developed to the highest pitch? Is a native of the Andaman Islands the superior of Socrates? If you admit that Socrates is superior to the savage, where do you draw the line between the natural and the artificial? If a coral reef is natural and beautiful because it is the work of insects, and a town artificial and ugly because made by man, we must reject as unnatural all the best products of the human race. If you distinguish between different works of man, the distinction becomes irrelevant, for the products to which we most object are just as natural, in any assignable sense of the word, as those which we most admire. The word natural may indeed be used as equivalent simply to beneficial or healthy; but then it loses all value as an implicit test of what is and what is not beneficial. Probably, indeed, some such sense was floating before the minds of most who have used the term. We shall generally find a vague recognition of the fact that there is a continuous series of integrating and disintegrating processes; that some charges imply a normal development of the social or individual organism leading to increased health and strength, whilst others are significant of disease and ultimate obliteration or decay of structure. Thus the artificial style of the Pope school, the appeals to the muse, the pastoral affectation, and so forth, may be called unnatural, because

the philosophy of that style is the retention of obsolete symbols after all vitality has departed, and when they consequently become mere obstructions, embarrassing the free flow of emotion which they once stimulated.

But, however this may be, it is plain that the very different senses given to the word nature by different schools of thought were characteristic of profoundly different conceptions of the world and its order. There is a sense in which it may be said with perfect accuracy that the worship of nature, so far from being a fresh doctrine of the new school, was the most characteristic tenet of the school from which it dissented. All the speculative part of the English literature in the first half of the eighteenth century is a prolonged discussion as to the meaning and value of the law of nature, the religion of nature, and the state of nature. The deist controversy, which occupied every one of the keenest thinkers of the time, turned essentially upon this problem : granting that there is an ascertainable and absolutely true religion of nature, what is its relation to revealed religion? That, for example, is the question explicitly discussed in Butler's typical book, which gives the pith of the whole orthodox argument ; and the same speculation suggested the theme of Pope's 'Essay on Man,' which, in its occasional strength and its many weaknesses, is perhaps the most characteristic, though far from the most valuable, product of the time. The religion of nature undoubtedly meant something very different with Butler or Pope from what it would have meant with Wordsworth or Coleridge—something so different, indeed, that we might at first say that the two creeds had nothing in common but the name. But we may see from Rousseau that there was a real and intimate connection. Rousseau's philosophy, in fact, is taken bodily from the

teaching of his English predecessors. His celebrated profession of faith through the lips of the Vicaire Savoyard, which delighted Voltaire and profoundly influenced the leaders of the French Revolution, is in fact the expression of a deism identical with that of Pope's essay.[1] The political theories of the Social Contract are founded upon the same base which served Locke and the English political theorists of 1688 ; and are applied to sanction the attempt to remodel existing societies in accordance with what they would have called the law of nature. It is again perfectly true that Rousseau drew from his theory consequences which inspired Robespierre, and would have made Locke's hair stand on end ; and that Pope would have been scandalised at the too open revelation of his religious tendencies. It is also true that Rousseau's passion was of infinitely greater importance than his philosophy. But it remains true that the logical framework into which his theories were fitted came to him straight from the same school of thought which was dominant in England during the preceding period. The real change effected by Rousseau was that he breathed life into the dead bones. The English theorists, as has been admirably shown by Mr. Morley in his 'Rousseau,' acted after their national method. They accepted doctrines which, if logically developed, would have led to a radical revolution, and therefore refused to develop them logically. They remained in their favourite attitude of compromise, and declined altogether to accommodate practice to theory. Locke's political principles fairly carried out implied universal suffrage, the absolute supremacy of the popular will, and the abolition of class

[1] Rousseau himself seems to refer to Clarke, the leader of the English rationalising school, as the best expounder of his theory, and defended Pope's Essay against the criticisms of Voltaire.

privileges. And yet it never seems to have occurred to him that he was even indirectly attacking that complex structure of the British Constitution, rooted in history, marked in every detail by special conditions of growth, and therefore anomalous to the last degree when tried by *à priori* reasoning, of which Burke's philosophical eloquence gives the best explanation and apology. Similarly, Clarke's theology is pure deism, embodied in a series of propositions worked out on the model of a mathematical text-book, and yet in his eyes perfectly consistent with an acceptance of the orthodox dogmas which repose upon traditional authority. This attitude of mind, so intelligible on this side of the Channel, was utterly abhorrent to Rousseau's logical instincts. Englishmen were content to keep their abstract theories for the closet or the lecture-room, and dropped them as soon as they were in the pulpit or in Parliament. Rousseau could give no quarter to any doctrine which could not be fitted into a symmetrical edifice of abstract reasoning. He carried into actual warfare the weapons which his English teachers had kept for purposes of mere scholastic disputation. A monarchy, an order of privileged nobility, a hierarchy claiming supernatural authority, were not logically justifiable on the accepted principles. Never mind, was the English answer, they work very well in practice ; let us leave them alone. Down with them to the ground ! was Rousseau's passionate retort. Realise the ideal ; force practice into conformity with theory ; the voice of the poor and the oppressed is crying aloud for vengeance ; the divergence of the actual from the theoretical is no mere trifle to be left to the slow action of time ; it means the misery of millions and the corruption of their rulers. The doctrine which had amused philosophers was to become the war-cry of the

masses; the men of '89 were at no loss to translate into precepts suited for the immediate wants of the day the doctrines which found their first utterance in the glow of his voluminous eloquence; and the fall of the Bastille showed the first vibrations of the earthquake which is still shaking the soil of Europe.

It is easy, then, to give a logical meaning to Rousseau's return to nature. The whole inanimate world, so ran his philosophy, is perfect, and shows plainly the marks of the Divine workmanship. All evil really comes from man's abuse of freewill. Mountains, and forests, and seas, all objects which have not suffered from his polluting touch, are perfect and admirable. Let us fall down and worship. Man, too, himself, as he came from his Creator's hands, is perfect. His 'natural'—that is, original—impulses are all good; and in all men, in all races and regions of the earth, we find a conscience which unerringly distinguishes good from evil, and a love of his fellows which causes man to obey the dictates of his conscience. And yet the world, as we see it, is a prison or a lazar-house. Disease and starvation make life a burden, and poison the health of the coming generations; those whom fortune has placed above the masses make use of their advantages to harden their hearts, and extract means of selfish enjoyment from the sufferings of their fellow-creatures. What is the source of this heartrending discord? The abuse of men's freewill; that is, of the mysterious power which enables us to act contrary to the dictates of nature. What is the best name for the disease which it generates? Luxury and corruption—the two cant objects of denunciations which were as popular in the pre-revolutionary generation as attacks upon sensationalism and over-excitement at the present day. And

what, then, is the mode of cure? The return to nature. We are to make history run backwards, to raze to its foundations the whole social and intellectual structure that has been erected by generations of corrupt and selfish men. Everything by which the civilised man differs from some theoretical pretension is tainted with a kind of original sin. Political institutions, as they exist, are conveniences for enabling the rich to rob the poor, and churches contrivances by which priests make ignorance and superstition play into the hands of selfish authority. Level all the existing order, and build up a new one on principles of pure reason; give up all the philosophical and theological dogmas, which have been the work of designing priests and bewildered speculators, and revert to that pure and simple religion which is divinely implanted in the heart of every uncorrupted human being. The Savoyard vicar, if you have any doubts, will tell you what is the true creed; and if you don't believe it, is Rousseau's rather startling corollary, you ought to be put to death.

That final touch shows the arbitrary and despotic spirit characteristic of the relentless theorist. I need not here inquire what relation may be borne by Rousseau's theories to any which could now be accepted by intelligent thinkers. It is enough to say that there would be, to put it gently, some slight difficulty in settling the details of this pure creed common to all unsophisticated minds, and in seeing what would be left when we had destroyed all institutions alloyed by sin and selfishness. The meaning, however, in this connection of his love of nature, taking the words in their mere common-sense, is in harmony with his system. The mountains, whose worship he was the first to adumbrate, if not actually to institute, were the symbols of the great natural

forces free from any stain of human interference. Greed and cruelty had not stained the pure waters of his lovely lake, or dimmed the light to which his vicar points as in the early morning it grazes the edges of the mighty mountain buttresses. Whatever symbolism may be found in the Alps, suggesting emotions of awe, wonder, and softened melancholy, came unstained by association with the vices of a complex civilisation. If poets and critics have not quite analysed the precise nature of our modern love of mountain scenery, the sentiment may at least be illustrated by a modern parallel. The most eloquent writer who, in our day, has transferred to his pages the charm of Alpine beauties shares in many ways Rousseau's antipathy for the social order. Mr. Ruskin would explain better than anyone why the love of the sublimest scenery should be associated with a profound conviction that all things are out of joint, and that society can only be regenerated by rejecting all the achievements upon which the ordinary optimist plumes himself. After all, it is not surprising that those who are most sick of man as he is should love the regions where man seems smallest. When Swift wished to express his disgust for his race, he showed how absurd our passions appear in a creature six inches high ; and the mountains make us all Liliputians. In other mouths Rousseau's sentiment, more fully interpreted, became unequivocally misanthropical. Byron, if any definite logical theory were to be fixed upon him, excluded the human race at large from his conception of nature. He loved, or talked as though he loved, the wilderness precisely because it was a wilderness ; the sea because it sent men 'shivering to their gods,' and the mountains because their avalanches crush the petty works of human industry. Rousseau was less anti-social

than his disciple. The mountains with him were the great barriers which kept civilisation and all its horrors at bay. They were the asylums for liberty and simplicity. There the peasant, unspoilt as yet by *trinkgelds*, not oppressed by the great, nor corrupted by the rich, could lead that idyllic life upon which his fancy delighted. In a passage quoted, as Sainte-Beuve notices, by Cowper, Rousseau describes, with his usual warmth of sentiment, the delightful *matinée anglaise* passed in sight of the Alps by the family which had learnt the charms of simplicity, and regulated its manners and the education of its children by the unsophisticated laws of nature. It is doubtless a charming picture, though the virtuous persons concerned are a little over-conscious of their virtue, and it indicates a point of coincidence between the two men. Rousseau, as Mr. Morley says, could appreciate as well as Cowper the charms of a simple and natural life. Nobody could be more eloquent on the beauty of domesticity; no one could paint better the happiness of family life, where the main occupation was the primitive labour of cultivating the ground, where no breath of unhallowed excitement penetrated from the restless turmoil of the outside world, where the mother knew her place, and kept to her placid round of womanly duties, and where the children were taught with a gentle firmness which developed every germ of reason and affection, without undue stimulus or undue repression. And yet one must doubt whether Cowper would have felt himself quite at ease in the family of the Wolmars. The circle which gathered round the hearth at Olney to listen for the horn of the approaching postman, and solaced itself with cups 'that cheer but not inebriate,'[1] would have been a little scandalised by some of

[1] A phrase, by the way, which Cowper, though little given to borrowing, took straight from Berkeley's 'Siris.'

the sentiments current in the Vaudois paradise, and certainly by some of the antecedents of the party assembled. Cowper and Mrs. Unwin, and even their more fashionable friend, Lady Austen, would have felt their respectable prejudices shocked by contact with the new Héloïse ; and the views of life taken by their teacher, the converted slaveholder, John Newton, were as opposite as possible to those of Rousseau's imaginary vicar. Indeed, Rousseau's ideal families have that stain of affectation from which Cowper is so conspicuously free. The rose-colour is laid on too thickly They are too fond of taking credit for universal admiration of the fine feelings which invariably animate their breasts ; their charitable sentiments are apt to take the form of very easy condonation of vice ; and if they repudiate the world, we cannot believe that they are really unconscious of its existence. Perhaps this dash of self-consciousness was useful in recommending them to the taste of the jaded and weary society, sickening of a strange disease which it could not interpret to itself, and finding for the moment a new excitement in the charms of ancient simplicity. The real thing might have palled upon it. But Rousseau's artificial and self-conscious simplicity expressed that vague yearning and spirit of unrest which could generate a half-sensual sentimentalism, but could be repelled by genuine sentiment. Perhaps it not uncommonly happens that those who are more or less tainted with a morbid tendency can denounce it most effectually. The most effective satirist is the man who has escaped with labour and pains, and not without some grievous stains, from the slough in which others are still mired. The perfectly pure has sometimes too little sympathy with his weaker brethren to place himself at their point of view. Indeed, as we shall have occasion to remark,

Cowper is an instance of a thinker too far apart from the great world to apply the lash effectually.

Rousseau's view of the world and its evils was thus coherent enough, however unsatisfactory in its basis, and was a development of, not a reaction against, the previously dominant philosophy ; and, though using a different dialect and confined by different conditions, Cowper's attack upon the existing order harmonises with much of Rousseau's language. The first volume of poems, in which he had not yet discovered the secret of his own strength, is in form a continuation of the satires of the Pope school, and in substance a religious version of Rousseau's denunciations of luxury. Amongst the first symptoms of the growing feeling of uneasy discontent had been the popularity of Brown's now-forgotten 'Estimate.'

> The inestimable estimate of Brown
> Rose like a paper kite, and charmed the town,

says Cowper ; and he proceeds to show that, though Chatham's victorious administration had for a moment restored the self-respect of the country, the evils denounced by Brown were symptoms of a profound and lasting disease. The poems called the 'Progress of Error,' 'Expostulation,' 'Truth,' 'Hope,' 'Charity,' and 'Conversation,' all turn upon the same theme. Though Cowper is for brief spaces playful or simply satirical, he always falls back into his habitual vein of meditation. For the ferocious personalities of Churchill, the coarse-fibred friend of his youth, we have a sad strain of lamentation over the growing luxury and effeminacy of the age. It is a continued anticipation of the lines in the 'Task,' which seem to express his most serious and sincere conviction.

> The course of human ills, from good to ill,
> From ill to worse, is fatal, never fails.
> Increase of power begets increase of wealth,
> Wealth luxury, and luxury excess:
> Excess the scrofulous and itchy plague,
> That seizes first the opulent, descends
> To the next rank contagious, and in time
> Taints downwards all the graduated scale
> Of order, from the chariot to the plough.

That is his one unvariable lesson, set in different lights, but associated more or less closely with every observation. The world is ripening or rotting; and, as with Rousseau, luxury is the most significant name of the absorbing evil. That such a view should commend itself to a mind so clouded with melancholy would not be at any time surprising, but it fell in with a widely spread conviction. Cowper had not, indeed, learnt the most effective mode of touching men's hearts. Separated by a retirement of twenty years from the world, with which he had never been very familiar, and at which he only 'peeped through the loop-holes of retreat,' his satire wanted the brilliance, the quickness of illustration from actual life, which alone make satire readable. His tone of feeling too frequently suggests that the critic represents the querulous comments of old ladies gossiping about the outside world over their tea-cups, easily scandalised by very simple things. Mrs. Unwin was an excellent old lady, and Newton a most zealous country clergyman. Probably they were intrinsically superior to the fine ladies and gentlemen who laughed at them. But a mind acclimatised to the atmosphere which they breathed inevitably lost its nervous tone. There was true masculine vigour underlying Cowper's jeremiads; but it was natural that many people should only see in him an amiable valetudinarian, not qualified for a censorship of statesmen and

men of the world. The man who fights his way through London streets can't stop to lament over every splash and puddle which might shock poor Cowper's nervous sensibility.

The last poem of the series, however, 'Retirement,' showed that Cowper had a more characteristic and solacing message to mankind than a mere rehearsal of the threadbare denunciations of luxury. The 'Task' revealed his genuine power. There appeared those admirable delineations of country scenery and country thoughts which Sainte-Beuve detaches so lovingly from the mass of serious speculation in which they are embedded. What he, as a purely literary critic, passed over as comparatively uninteresting gives the exposition of Cowper's intellectual position. The poem is in fact a political, moral, and religious disquisition interspersed with charming vignettes, which, though not obtrusively moralised, illustrate the general thesis. The poetical connoisseur may separate them from their environment, as a collector of engravings might cut out the illustrations from the now worthless letterpress. The poor author might complain that the most important moral was thus eliminated from his book. But the author is dead, and his opinions don't much matter. To understand Cowper's mind, however, we must take the now obsolete meditation with the permanently attractive pictures. To know why he so tenderly loved the slow windings of the sinuous Ouse we must see what he thought of the great Babel beyond. It is the distant murmur of the great city that makes his little refuge so attractive. The general vein of thought which appears in every book of the poem is most characteristically expressed in the fifth, called 'A Winter Morning Walk.' Cowper strolls out at sunrise in his usual mood of tender

playfulness, smiles at the vast shadow cast by the low winter sun, as he sees upon the cottage wall the

> Preposterous sight! the legs without the man.

He remarks, with a passing recollection of his last sermon, that we are all shadows; but turns to note the cattle cowering behind the fences; the labourer carving the haystack; the woodman going to work, followed by his half-bred cur, and cheered by the fragrance of his short pipe. He watches the marauding sparrows, and thinks with tenderness of the fate of less audacious birds; and then pauses to examine the strange fretwork erected at the mill-dam by the capricious freaks of the frost. Art, it suggests to him, is often beaten by Nature; and his fancy goes off to the winter palace of ice erected by the Russian empress. His friend Newton makes use of the same easily allegorised object in one of his religious writings; though I know not whether the poet or the divine first turned it to account. Cowper, at any rate, is immediately diverted into a meditation on 'human grandeur and the courts of kings.' The selfishness and folly of the great give him an obvious theme for a dissertation in the true Rousseau style. He tells us how 'kings were first invented'—the ordinary theory of the time being that political—deists added religious—institutions were all somehow 'invented' by knaves to impose upon fools. 'War is a game,' he says, in the familiar phrase,

> 'Which were their subjects wise
> Kings would not play at.'

But, unluckily, their subjects are fools. In England indeed—for Cowper, by virtue of his family traditions, was in theory a sound Whig—we know how far to trust our kings; and he rises into a warmth on behalf of liberty for which he

thinks it right to make a simple-minded apology in a note. The sentiment suggests a vigorous and indeed prophetic denunciation of the terrors of the Bastille, and its 'horrid towers and dungeons.'

> There's not an English heart that would not leap
> To hear that ye were fallen at last!

Within five or six years English hearts were indeed welcoming the event thus foretold as the prospect of a new era of liberty. Liberty, says Cowper, is the one thing which makes England dear. Were that boon lost,

> I would at least bewail it under skies
> Milder, amongst a people less austere;
> In scenes which, having never known me free,
> Would not reproach me with the loss I felt.[1]

So far Cowper was but expressing the sentiments of Rousseau omitting, of course, Rousseau's hearty dislike for England. But liberty suggests to Cowper a different and more solemn vein of thought. There are worse dungeons, he remembers, than the Bastille, and a slavery compared with which that of the victims of French tyranny is a trifle—

> There is yet a liberty unsung
> By poets, and by senators unpraised,
> Which monarchs cannot grant, nor all the power
> Of earth and hell confederate take away.

The patriot is lower than the martyr, though more highly prized by the world; and Cowper changes his strain of

[1] Lord Tennyson suggests the same consolation in the lines ending—

> Yet waft me from the harbour-mouth,
> Wild winds, I seek a warmer sky;
> And I will see before I die
> The palms and temples of the South.

patriotic fervour into a prolonged devotional comment upon the text,

> He is the freeman whom the truth makes free,
> And all are slaves besides.

Who would have thought that we could glide so easily into so solemn a topic from looking at the quaint freaks of morning shadows? But the charm of the 'Task' is its sincerity; and in Cowper's mind the most trivial objects really are connected by subtle threads of association with the most solemn thoughts. He begins with mock heroics on the sofa, and ends with a glowing vision of the millennium. No dream of human perfectibility, but the expected advent of the true ruler of the earth, is the relief to the palpable darkness of the existing world. The 'Winter Walk' traces the circle of thought through which his mind invariably revolves.

It would be a waste of labour to draw out in definite formula the systems adopted, from emotional sympathy, rather than from any logical speculation, by Cowper and Rousseau. Each in some degree owed his power—though Rousseau in a far higher degree than Cowper—to his profound sensitiveness to the heavy burden of the time. Each of them felt like a personal grief, and exaggerated in a distempered imagination, the weariness and the forebodings more dimly present to contemporaries. In an age when old forms of government had grown rigid and obsolete, when the stiffened crust of society was beginning to heave with new throes, when ancient faiths had left mere husks of dead formulæ to cramp the minds of men, when even superficial observers were startled by vague omens of a coming crash, or expected some melodramatic regeneration of the world, it was perhaps not strange that two men, tottering on the

verge of madness, should be amongst the most impressive prophets. The truth of Butler's speculation, that nations, like individuals, might go mad, was about to receive an apparent confirmation. Cowper, like Rousseau, might see the world through the distorting haze of a disordered fancy, but the world at large was itself strangely disordered, and the smouldering discontent of the inarticulate masses found an echo in their passionate utterances. Their voices were like the moan of a coming earthquake.

The difference, however, so characteristic of the two countries, is reflected by the national representatives. Nobody could be less of a revolutionist than Cowper. His whiggism was little more than a tradition. Though he felt bound to denounce kings, to talk about Hampden and Sidney, and to sympathise with Mrs. Macaulay's old-fashioned republicanism, there was not a more loyal subject of George III., or one more disposed, when he could turn his mind from his pet hares to the concerns of the empire, to lament the revolt of the American colonies. The awakening of England from the pleasant slumbers of the eighteenth century—for they seem pleasant in these more restless times—took place in a curiously sporadic and heterogeneous fashion. In France the spiritual and temporal were so intricately welded together, the interests of the State were so deeply involved in maintaining the faith of the Church, that conservatism and orthodoxy naturally went together. Philosophers rejected with equal fervour the established religious and the political creed. The new volume of passionate feeling, no longer satisfied with the ancient barriers, poured itself in both cases into the revolutionary channel. In England no such plain and simple issue existed. We had our usual system of compromises in

practice, and hybrid combinations of theory. There were infidel conservatives and radical believers. The man who more than any other influenced English history during that century was John Wesley. Wesley was to the full as deeply impressed as Rousseau with the moral and social evils of the time. We may doubt whether Cowper's denunciations of luxury owed most to Rousseau's sentimental eloquence or to the matter-of-fact vigour of Wesley's 'Appeals.' Cowper's portrait of Whitefield—'Leuconomus,' as he calls him, to evade the sneers of the cultivated—and his frequent references to the despised sect of Methodists reveal the immediate source of much of his indignation. So far as those evils were caused by the intellectual and moral conditions common to Europe at large, Wesley and Rousseau might be called allies. Both of them gave satisfaction to the need for a free play of unsatisfied emotions. Their solutions of the problem were of course radically different; and Cowper only speaks the familiar language of his sect when he taunts the philosopher with his incapacity to free man from his bondage:

> Spend all the powers
> Of rant and rhapsody in virtue's praise,
> Be most sublimely good, verbosely grand,
> And with poetic trappings grace thy prose
> Till it outmantle all the pride of verse;

where he was possibly, as Sainte-Beuve suggests, thinking of Rousseau, though Shaftesbury was the more frequent butt of such denunciations. The difference in the solution of the great problem of moral regeneration was facilitated by the difference of the environment. Rousseau, though he shows a sentimental tenderness for Christianity, could not be orthodox without putting himself on the side of the

oppressors. Wesley, though feeling profoundly the social discords of the time, could take the side of the poor without the need of breaking in pieces a rigid system of class-privilege. The evil which he had to encounter did not present itself as tyranny oppressing helplessness, but as a general neglect of reciprocal duties verging upon license. On the whole, therefore, he took the conservative side of political questions. When the American war gave the first signal of coming troubles, the combinations of opinion were significant of the general state of mind. Wesley and Johnson denounced the rebels from the orthodox point of view with curious coincidence of language. The only man of equal intellectual calibre who took the same side unequivocally was the arch-infidel Gibbon. The then sleepy Established Church was too tolerant or too indifferent to trouble him: why should he ally himself with Puritans and enthusiasts to attack the Government which at once supported and tied its hands? On the other side, we find such lovers of the established religious order as Burke associated with free-thinkers like Tom Paine and Horne Tooke. Tooke might agree with Voltaire in private, but he could not air his opinions to a party which relied in no small measure on the political zeal of sound dissenters. Dissent, in fact, meant something like atheism combined with radicalism in France; in England it meant desire for the traditional liberties of Englishmen, combined with an often fanatical theological creed.

Cowper, brought up amidst such surroundings, had no temptation to adopt Rousseau's sweeping revolutionary fervour. His nominal whiggism was not warmed into any subversive tendency. The labourers with whose sorrows he sympathised might be ignorant, coarse, and drunken; he

saw their faults too clearly to believe in Rousseau's idyllic conventionalities, and painted the truth as realistically as Crabbe : they required to be kept out of the public-house, not to be liberated from obsolete feudal disqualifications ; a poacher, such as he described, was not the victim of a brutal aristocracy, but simply a commonplace variety of thief. And, on the other hand, when he denounces the laziness and selfishness of the Establishment, the luxurious bishops, the sycophantic curates, the sporting and the fiddling and the card-playing parson, he has no thought of the enmity to Christianity which such satire would have suggested to a French reformer, but is mentally contrasting the sleepiness of the bishops with the virtues of Newton or Whitefield.

> 'Where dwell these matchless saints?' old Curio cries.
> 'Even at your side, sir, and before your eyes,
> The favour'd few, the enthusiasts you despise.'

And whatever be thought of Cowper's general estimate of the needs of his race, it must be granted that in one respect his philosophy was more consequent than Rousseau's. Rousseau, though a deist in theory, rejected the deist conclusion, that whatever is, is right ; and consequently the problem of how it can be that men, who are naturally so good, are in fact so vile, remained a difficulty, only slurred over by his fluent metaphysics about freewill. Cowper's belief in the profound corruption of human nature supplied him with a doctrine less at variance with his view of facts. He has no illusions about the man of nature. The savage, he tells us, was a drunken beast till rescued from his bondage by the zeal of the Moravian missionaries ; and the poor are to be envied, not because their lives are actually much

better, but because they escape the temptations and sophistries of the rich and learned.

But how should this sentiment fit in with Cowper's love of nature? In the language of his sect, nature is generally opposed to grace. It is applied to a world in which not only the human inhabitants, but the whole creation, is tainted with a mysterious evil. Why should Cowper find relief in contemplating a system in which waste and carnage play so conspicuous a part? Why, when he rescued his pet hares from the general fate of their race, did he not think of the innumerable hares who suffered not only from guns and greyhounds, but from the general annoyances incident to the struggle for existence? Would it not have been more logical if he had placed his happiness altogether in another world, where the struggles and torments of our everyday life are unknown? Indeed, though Cowper, as an orthodox Protestant, held that ascetic practices ministered simply to spiritual conceit, was he not bound to a sufficiently galling form of asceticism? His friends habitually looked askance upon all those pleasures of the intellect and the imagination which are not directly subservient to the religious emotions. They had grave doubts of the expediency of his studies of the pagan Homer. They looked with suspicion upon the slightest indulgence in social amusements. And Cowper fully shared their sentiments. A taste for music, for example, generally suggests to him a parson fiddling when he ought to be praying; and following once more the lead of Newton, he remarks upon the Handel celebration as a piece of grotesque profanity. The name of science calls up to him a pert geologist, declaring after an examination of the earth

> That He who made it, and revealed its date
> To Moses, was mistaken in its age.

Not only is the great bulk of his poetry directly religious or devotional, but on publishing the 'Task' he assures Newton that he has admitted none but Scriptural images, and kept as closely as possible to Scriptural language. Elsewhere he quotes Swift's motto, *Vive la bagatelle !* as a justification of 'John Gilpin.' Fox is recorded to have said that Swift must have been fundamentally a good-natured man because he wrote so much nonsense. To me the explanation seems to be very different. Nothing is more melancholy than Swift's elaborate triflings, because they represent the efforts of a powerful intellect passing into madness under enforced inaction, to kill time by childish occupation. And the diagnosis of Cowper's case is similar. He trifles, he says, because he is reduced to it by necessity. His most ludicrous verses have been written in his saddest mood. It would be, he adds, 'but a shocking vagary' if the sailors on a ship in danger relieved themselves 'by fiddling and dancing; yet sometimes much such a part act I.' His love of country sights and pleasures is so intense because it is the most effectual relief. 'Oh!' he exclaims, 'I could spend whole days and nights in gazing upon a lovely prospect! My eyes drink the rivers as they flow.' And he adds, in his characteristic vein of thought, 'if every human being upon earth could feel as I have done for many years, there might perhaps be many miserable men among them, but not an unawakened one could be found from the Arctic to the Antarctic circle.' The earth and the sun itself are, he says, but 'baubles;' but they are the baubles which alone can distract his attention from more awful prospects. His little garden and greenhouse are playthings lent to him for a time, and soon to be left. He 'never framed a wish or formed a plan,' as he says in the 'Task,' of which the

scene was not laid in the country ; and when the gloomiest forebodings unhinged his mind, his love became a passion. He is like his own prisoner in the Bastille playing with spiders. All other avenues of delight are closed to him ; he believes, whenever his dark hour of serious thought returns, that he is soon to be carried off to unspeakable torments ; all ordinary methods of human pleasure seem to be tainted with some corrupting influence ; but whilst playing with his spaniel, or watching his cucumbers, or walking with Mrs. Unwin in the fields, he can for a moment distract his mind with purely innocent pleasures. The awful background of his visions, never quite absent, though often, we may hope, far removed from actual consciousness, throws out these hours of delight into more prominent relief. The sternest of his monitors, John Newton himself, could hardly grudge this cup of cold water presented, as it were, to the lips of a man in a self-made purgatory.

This is the peculiar turn which gives so characteristic a tone to Cowper's loving portraits of scenery. He is like the Judas seen by St. Brandan on the iceberg ; he is enjoying a momentary relaxation between the past of misery and the future of anticipated torment. Such a sentiment must, fortunately, be in some sense exceptional and idiosyncratic. And yet, once more, it fell in with the prevailing current of thought. Cowper agrees with Rousseau in finding that the contemplation of scenery, unpolluted by human passion, and the enjoyment of a calm domestic life, is the best anodyne for a spirit wearied with the perpetual disorders of a corrupt social order. He differs from him, as we have seen, in the conviction that a deeper remedy is wanting than any mere political change ; in a more profound sense of human wickedness, and, on the other hand,

in a narrower estimate of the conditions of human life. His definition of Nature, to put it logically, would exclude that natural man in whose potential existence Rousseau more or less believed. The passionate love of scenery was enough to distinguish him from the poets of the preceding school, whose supposed hatred of Nature meant simply that they were thoroughly immersed in the pleasures of a society then first developed in its modern form, and not yet undermined by the approach of a new revolution. The men of Pope and Addison's time looked upon country squires as bores incapable of intellectual pleasure, and, therefore, upon country life as a topic for gentle ridicule, or more frequently as an unmitigated nuisance. Probably their estimate was a very sound one. When a true poet like Thomson really enjoyed the fresh air, his taste did not become a passion, and the scenery appeared to him as a pleasant background to his Castle of Indolence. Cowper's peculiar religious views prevented him again from anticipating the wider and more philosophical sentiment of Wordsworth. Like Pope and Wordsworth, indeed, he occasionally uses language which has a pantheistic sound. He expresses his belief that

> There lives and works
> A soul in all things, and that soul is God.

But when Pope uses a similar phrase, it is the expression of a decaying philosophy which never had much vitality, or passed from the sphere of intellectual speculation to affect the imagination and the emotions. It is a dogma which he holds sincerely, it may be, but not firmly enough to colour his habitual sentiments. With Wordsworth, whatever its precise meaning, it is an expression of an habitual and abiding sentiment, which rises naturally to his lips when-

ever he abandons himself to his spontaneous impulses. With Cowper, as is the case with all Cowper's utterances, it is absolutely sincere for the time ; but it is a doctrine not very easily adapted to his habitual creed, and which drops out of his mind whenever he passes from external nature to himself or his fellows. The indwelling divinity whom he recognises in every 'freckle, streak, or stain' on his favourite flowers, seems to be hopelessly removed from his own personal interests. An awful and mysterious decree has separated him for ever from the sole source of consolation.

This is not the place to hint at any judgment upon Cowper's theology, or to inquire how far a love of nature, in his sense of the words, can be logically combined with a system based upon the fundamental dogma of the corruption of man. Certainly a similar anticipation of the poetical pantheism of Wordsworth may be found in that most logical of Calvinists, Jonathan Edwards. Cowper, too, could be at no loss for scriptural precedents when recognising the immediate voice of God in thunder and earthquakes, or in the calmer voices of the waterbrooks and the meadows. His love of nature, at any rate, is at once of a narrower and sincerer kind than that which Rousseau first made fashionable. He has no tendency to the misanthropic or cynical view which induces men of morbid or affected minds to profess a love of savage scenery simply because it is savage. Neither does he rise to the more philosophical view which sees in the seas and the mountains the most striking symbols of the great forces of the universe to which we must accommodate ourselves, and which might therefore rightfully be associated by a Wordsworth with the deepest emotions of reverential awe. Nature is to him but a collection of 'baubles,' soon to be taken away, and he seeks in its

contemplation a temporary relief from anguish, not a permanent object of worship. He would dread that sentiment as a deistical form of idolatry ; and he is equally far from thinking that the natural man, wherever that vague person might be found, could possibly be a desirable object of imitation. His love of nature, in short, keen as it might be, was not the reflection of any philosophical, religious, or political theory. But it was genuine enough to charm many who might regard his theological sentiments as a mere recrudescence of an obsolete form of belief. Mr. Mill tells us how Wordsworth's poetry, little as he sympathised with Wordsworth's opinions, solaced an intellect wearied with premature Greek and over-doses of Benthamism. Such a relief must have come to many readers of Cowper, who would put down his religion as rank fanaticism, and his satire as anile declamation. Men suffered even then—though Cowper was a predecessor of Miss Austen—from existing forms of 'life at high pressure.' If life was not then so overcrowded, the evils under which men were suffering appeared to be even more hopeless. The great lesson of the value of intervals of calm retreat, of silence and meditation, was already needed, if it is now still more pressing. Cowper said, substantially, Leave the world, as Rousseau said, Upset the world. The reformer, to say nothing of his greater intellectual power, naturally interested the world which he threatened more than the recluse whom it frightened. Limited within a narrower circle of ideas, and living in a society where the great issues of the time were not presented in so naked a form, Cowper's influence ran in a more confined channel. He felt the incapacity of the old order to satisfy the emotional wants of mankind, but was content to revive the old forms of belief instead of seeking

a more radical remedy in some subversive or reconstructive system of thought. But the depth and sincerity of feeling which explains his marvellous intensity of pathos is sometimes a pleasant relief to the sentimentalism of his greater predecessor. Nor is it hard to understand why his passages of sweet and melancholy musing by the quiet Ouse should have come like a breath of fresh air to the jaded generation waiting for the fall of the Bastille—and of other things.

THE FIRST EDINBURGH REVIEWERS

When browsing at random in a respectable library, one is pretty sure to hit upon the early numbers of the 'Edinburgh Review,' and prompted in consequence to ask oneself the question, What are the intrinsic merits of writing which produced so great an effect upon our grandfathers? The 'Review,' we may say, has lived into a third generation. The last survivor of the original set has passed away; and there are but few relics even of that second galaxy of authors amongst whom Macaulay was the most brilliant star. One may speak, therefore, without shocking existing susceptibilities, of the 'Review' in its first period, when Jeffrey, Sydney Smith, and Brougham were the most prominent names. A man may still call himself middle-aged and yet have a distinct memory of Brougham courting, rather too eagerly, the applause of the Social Science Association; or Jeffrey, as he appeared in his kindly old age, when he could hardly have spoken sharply of a Lake poet; and even of the last outpourings of the irrepressible gaiety of Sydney Smith. But the period of their literary activity is already so distant as to have passed into the domain of history. It is the same thing to say that it already belongs in some degree to the neighbouring or overlapping domain of fiction.

There is, in fact, already a conventional history of the early 'Edinburgh Review,' repeated without hesitation in

all literary histories and assumed in a thousand allusions, which becomes a little incredible when we take down the dusty old volumes, where dingy calf has replaced the original splendours of the blue and yellow, and which have inevitably lost much of their savour during more than half a century's repose. The story of the original publication has been given by the chief founders. Edinburgh, at the beginning of the century, was one of those provincial centres of intellectual activity which have an increasing difficulty in maintaining themselves against metropolitan attractions. In the last half of the eighteenth century, such philosophical activity as existed in the country seemed to have taken refuge in the northern half of the island. A set of brilliant young men, living in a society still proud of the reputation of Hume, Adam Smith, Reid, Robertson, Dugald Stewart, and other northern luminaries, might naturally be susceptible to the stimulus of literary ambition. In politics the most rampant Conservatism, rendered bitter by the recent experience of the French Revolution, exercised a sway in Scotland more undisputed and vigorous than it is now easy to understand. The younger men who inclined to Liberalism were naturally prepared to welcome an organ for the expression of their views. Accordingly a knot of clever lads (Smith was 31, Jeffrey 29, Brown 24, Horner 24, and Brougham 23) met in the third (not, as Smith afterwards said, the 'eighth or ninth') story of a house in Edinburgh and started the journal by acclamation. The first number appeared in October 1802, and produced, we are told, an 'electrical' effect. Its old humdrum rivals collapsed before it. Its science, its philosophy, its literature were equally admired. Its politics excited the wrath and dread of Tories and the exultant delight of Whigs. It was, says Cockburn,

a 'pillar of fire,' a far-seen beacon, suddenly lighted in a dark place. Its able advocacy of political principles was as striking as its judicial air of criticism, unprecedented in periodical literature. To appreciate its influence, we must remember, says Sydney Smith, that in those days a number of reforms, now familiar to us all, were still regarded as startling innovations. The Catholics were not emancipated, nor the game-laws softened, nor the Court of Chancery reformed, nor the slave-trade abolished. Cruel punishment still disgraced the criminal code, libel was put down with vindictive severity, prisoners were not allowed counsel in capital cases, and many other grievances now wholly or partially redressed were still flourishing in full force.

Were they put down solely by the 'Edinburgh Review'? That, of course, would not be alleged by its most ardent admirers; though Sydney Smith certainly holds that the attacks of the 'Edinburgh' were amongst the most efficient causes of the many victories which followed. I am not concerned to dispute the statement; nor in fact do I doubt that it contains much truth. But if we look at the 'Review' simply as literary connoisseurs, and examine its volumes expecting to be edified by such critical vigour and such a plentiful outpouring of righteous indignation in burning language as might correspond to this picture of a great organ of liberal opinion, we shall, I fear, be cruelly disappointed. Let us speak the plain truth at once. Everyone who turns from the periodical literature of the present day to the original 'Edinburgh Review' will be amazed at its inferiority. It is generally dull, and, when not dull, flimsy. The vigour has departed; the fire is extinct. To some extent, of course, this is inevitable. Even the magnificent eloquence of Burke has lost some of its early gloss.

We can read, comparatively unmoved, passages that would have once carried us off our legs in the exuberant torrent of passionate invective. But, making all possible allowance for the fading of all things human, I think that every reader who is frank will admit his disappointment. Here and there, of course, amusing passages illuminated by Sydney Smith's humour or Jeffrey's slashing and swaggering retain a few sparks of fire. The pertness and petulance of the youthful critics are amusing, though hardly in the way intended by themselves. But, as a rule, one may most easily characterise the contents by saying that few of the articles would have a chance of acceptance by the editor of a first-rate periodical to-day; and that the majority belong to an inferior variety of what is now called 'padding'—mere perfunctory bits of work, obviously manufactured by the critic out of the book before him.

The great political importance of the 'Edinburgh Review' belongs to a later period. When the Whigs began to revive after the long reign of Tory principles, and such questions as Roman Catholic Emancipation and Parliamentary Reform were seriously coming to the front, the 'Review' grew to be a most effective organ of the rising party. Even in earlier years, it was doubtless a matter of real moment that the ablest periodical of the day should manifest sympathies with the cause then so profoundly depressed. But in those years there is nothing of that vehement and unsparing advocacy of Whig principles which we might expect from a band of youthful enthusiasts. So far indeed was the 'Review' from unhesitating partisanship that the sound Tory Scott contributed to its pages for some years; and so late as the end of 1807 invited Southey, then developing into fiercer Toryism, as became a 'renegade'

or a 'convert,' to enlist under Jeffrey. Southey, it is true, was prevented from joining by scruples shared by his correspondent, but it was not for another year that the breach became irreparable. The final offence was given by the 'famous article upon Cevallos,' which appeared in October 1808. Even at that period Scott understood some remarks of Jeffrey's as an offer to suppress the partisan tendencies of his 'Review.' Jeffrey repudiated this interpretation ; but the statement is enough to show that, for six years after its birth, the 'Review' had not been conducted in such a way as to pledge itself beyond all redemption in the eyes of staunch Tories.[1]

The Cevallos article, the work in uncertain proportions of Brougham and Jeffrey, was undoubtedly calculated to give offence. It contained an eloquent expression of fore-

[1] Scott's letter, stating that this overture had been made by Jeffrey under terror of the 'Quarterly,' was first published in Lockhart's 'Life of Scott.' Jeffrey denied that he could ever have made the offer, both because his contributors were too independent and because he had always considered politics to be (as he remembered to have told Scott) the 'right leg' of the 'Review.' Undoubtedly, though Scott's letter was written at the time and Jeffrey's contradiction many years afterwards, it seems that Scott must have exaggerated. And yet in Horner's 'Memoirs' we find a letter from Jeffrey which goes far to show that there was more than might be supposed to confirm Scott's statement. Jeffrey begs for Horner's assistance in the 'day of need,' caused by the Cevallos article and the threatened 'Quarterly.' He tells Horner that he may write upon any subject he pleases –'only no party politics, and nothing but exemplary moderation and impartiality on all politics. I have allowed too much mischief to be done from my mere indifference and love of sport ; but it would be inexcusable to spoil the powerful instrument we have got hold of for the sake of teasing and playing tricks.'—Horner's *Memoirs*, i. 439. It was on the occasion of the Cevallos article that the Earl of Buchan solemnly kicked the 'Review' from his study into the street—a performance which he supposed would be fatal to its circulation.

boding as to the chances of the war in Spain. The Whigs, whose policy had been opposed to the war, naturally prophesied its ill-success, and, until this period, facts had certainly not confuted their auguries. It was equally natural that their opponents should be scandalised by their apparent want of patriotism. Scott's indignation was characteristic. The 'Edinburgh Review,' he says, 'tells you coolly, "We foresee a revolution in this country as well as Mr. Cobbett;" and, to say the truth, by degrading the person of the sovereign, exalting the power of the French armies and the wisdom of their counsels, holding forth that peace (which they allow can only be purchased by the humiliating prostration of our honour) is indispensable to the very existence of this country, I think that for these two years past they have done their utmost to hasten the fufilment of their own prophecy.' Yet, he adds, 9,000 copies are printed quarterly, 'no genteel family *can* pretend to be without it,' and it contains the only valuable literary criticism of the day. The antidote was to be supplied by the foundation of the 'Quarterly.' The Cevallos article, as Brougham says, 'first made the Reviewers conspicuous as Liberals.'

Jeffrey and his friends were in fact in the very difficult position of all middle parties during a period of intense national and patriotic excitement. If they attacked Perceval or Canning or Castlereagh in one direction, they were equally opposed to the rough-and-ready democracy of Cobbett or Burdett, and to the more philosophical radicalism of men like Godwin or Bentham. They were generally too young to have been infected by the original Whig sympathy for the French Revolution, or embittered by the reaction. They condemned the principles of '89 as decidedly

if not as heartily as the Tories. The difference, as Sydney Smith said to his imaginary Tory, Abraham Plymley, is 'in the means, not in the end. We both love the Constitution, respect the King, and abhor the French.' Only, as the difference about the means was diametrical, Tories naturally held them to be playing into the hands of destructives, though more out of cowardice than malignity. In such a position it is not surprising if the Reviewers generally spoke in apologetic terms and with bated breath. They could protest against the dominant policy as rash and bigoted, but could not put forwards conflicting principles without guarding themselves against the imputation of favouring the common enemy. The Puritans of Radicalism set down this vacillation to a total want of fixed principle, if not to baser motives. The first volume of the 'Westminster Review' (1824) contains a characteristic assault upon the 'see-saw' system of the 'Edinburgh' by the two Mills. The 'Edinburgh' is sternly condemned for its truckling to the aristocracy, its cowardice, political immorality, and (of all things!) its sentimentalism. In after years J. S. Mill contributed to its pages himself; but the opinion of his fervid youth was that of the whole Bentham school.[1] It is plain, however, that the 'Review,' even when it had succeeded, did not absorb the activities of its contributors so exclusively as is sometimes suggested. They rapidly dispersed to enter upon different careers. Even before the first number appeared, Jeffrey complains that almost all his friends are about to emigrate to London; and the prediction was soon verified. Sydney Smith left to begin his career as a clergyman in London; Horner and Brougham

[1] See Mill's *Autobiography*, p. 92, for an interesting account of these articles.

almost immediately took to the English bar, with a view to pushing into public life; Allen joined Lord Holland; Charles Bell set up in a London practice; two other promising contributors took offence, and deserted the 'Review' in its infancy; and Jeffrey was left almost alone, though still a centre of attraction to the scattered group. He himself only undertook the editorship on the understanding that he might renounce it as soon as he could do without it; and always guarding himself most carefully against any appearance of deserting a legal for a literary career. Although the Edinburgh *cénacle* was not dissolved, its bonds were greatly loosened; the chief contributors were in no sense men who looked upon literature as a principal occupation; and Jeffrey, as much as Brougham and Horner, would have resented, as a mischievous imputation, the suggestion that his chief energies were devoted to the 'Review.' In some sense this might be an advantage. An article upon politics or philosophy is, of course, better done by a professed statesman and thinker than by a literary hack; but, on the other hand, a man who turns aside from politics or philosophy to do mere hackwork, does it worse than the professed man of letters. Work, taken up at odd hours to satisfy editorial importunity or add a few pounds to a narrow income, is apt to show the characteristic defects of all amateur performances. A very large part of the early numbers is amateurish in this objectionable sense. It is mere hand-to-mouth information, and is written, so to speak, with the left hand. A clever man has turned over the last new book of travels or poetry, or made a sudden incursion into foreign literature or into some passage of history entirely fresh to him, and has given his first impressions with an audacity which almost disarms one by its

extraordinary *naïveté*. The standard of such disquisitions was then so low that writing which would now be impossible passed muster without an objection. When, in later years, Macaulay discussed Hampden or Chatham, the book which he ostensibly reviewed was a mere pretext for producing the rich stores of a mind trained by years of previous historical study. Jeffrey wrote about Mrs. Hutchinson's 'Memoirs' and Pepys's 'Diary' as though the books had for the first time revealed to him the existence of Puritans or of courtiers under the Restoration. The author of an article upon German metaphysics at the present day would think it necessary to show that if he had not the portentous learning which Sir William Hamilton embodied in his 'Edinburgh' articles, he had at least read the book under review, and knew something of the language. The author (Thomas Brown—a man who should have known better) of a contemptuous review of Kant, in an early number of the 'Edinburgh,' makes it even ostentatiously evident that he has never read a line of the original, and that his whole knowledge is derived from what (by his own account) is a very rambling and inadequate French essay. The young gentlemen who wrote in those days have a jaunty mode of pronouncing upon all conceivable topics without even affecting to have studied the subject, which is amusing in its way, and which fully explains the flimsy nature of their performance.

The authors, in fact, regarded these essays at the time as purely ephemeral. The success of the 'Review' suggested republication long afterwards. The first collection of articles was, I presume, Sydney Smith's in 1839 ; Jeffrey's and Macaulay's followed in 1843 ; and at that time even Macaulay thought it necessary to explain that the republica-

tion was forced upon him by the Americans. The plan of passing even the most serious books through the pages of a periodical has become so common that such modesty would now imply the emptiest affectation. The collections of Jeffrey and Sydney Smith will give a sufficient impression of the earlier numbers of the 'Review.' The only contributors of equal reputation were Horner and Brougham. Horner, so far as one can judge, was a typical representative of those solid, indomitable Scotchmen whom one knows not whether to respect for their energy or to dread as the most intolerable of bores. He plodded through legal, metaphysical, scientific, and literary studies like an elephant forcing his way through a jungle ; and laboured as resolutely and systematically to acquire graces of style as to master the intricacies of the 'dismal science.' At an early age, and with no advantages of position, he had gained extraordinary authority in Parliament. Sydney Smith said of him that he had the Ten Commandments written on his face, and looked so virtuous that he might commit any crime with impunity. His death probably deprived us of a most exemplary statesman and first-rate Chancellor of the Exchequer, but it can hardly have been a great loss to literature. Passages from Horner's journals, given in his 'Memoirs,' are quaint illustrations of the frame of mind generally inculcated in manuals for the use of virtuous young men. At the age of twenty-eight, he resolved one day to meditate upon various topics, distributed under nine heads, including the society to be frequented in the metropolis ; the characters to be studied ; the scale of intimacies ; the style of conversation ; the use of other men's minds in self-education ; the regulation of ambition, of political sentiments, connections, and conduct ; the importance of 'steadily systematising all plans

and aims of life, and so providing against contingencies as to put happiness at least out of the reach of accident,' and the cultivation of moral feelings by 'dignified sentiments and pleasing associations' derived from poets, moralists, or actual life. Sydney Smith, in a very lively portrait, says that Horner was the best, kindest, simplest, and most incorruptible of mankind; but intimates sufficiently that his impenetrability to the facetious was something almost unexampled. A jest upon an important subject was, it seems, the only affliction which his strength of principle would not enable him to bear with patience. His contributions gave some solid economical speculation to the 'Review,' but were neither numerous nor lively. Brougham's amazing vitality wasted itself in a different way. His multifarious energy, from early boyhood to the borders of old age, would be almost incredible, if we had not the good fortune to be contemporaries of Mr. Gladstone. His share in the opening numbers of the 'Review' is another of the points upon which there is an odd conflict of testimony.[1] But from a very early period he was the most voluminous and, at times, the most valuable of contributors. It has been said that he once wrote a whole number, including articles upon lithotomy and Chinese music. It is more authentic that he

[1] It would appear, from one of Jeffrey's statements, that Brougham selfishly hung back till after the third number of the 'Review,' and its 'assured success' (Horner's *Memoirs*, i. p. 186, and Macvey Napier's *Correspondence*, p. 422); from another, that Brougham, though anxious to contribute, was excluded by Sydney Smith, from prudential motives. On the other hand, Brougham in his autobiography claims (by name) seven articles in the first number, five in the second, eight in the third, and five in the fourth; in five of which he had a collaborator. His hesitation, he says, ended before the appearance of the first number, and was due to doubts as to Jeffrey's possession of sufficient editorial power.

contributed six articles to one number at the very crisis of his political career, and at the same period he boasts of having written a fifth of the whole 'Review' to that time. He would sit down in a morning and write off twenty pages at a single effort. Jeffrey compares his own editorial authority to that of a feudal monarch over some independent barons. When Jeffrey gave up the 'Review,' this 'baron' aspired to something more like domination than independence. He made the unfortunate editor's life a burden to him. He wrote voluminous letters, objurgating, entreating, boasting of past services, denouncing rival contributors, declaring that a regard for the views of any other man was base subservience to a renegade Ministry, or foolish attention to the hints of understrappers; threatening, if he was neglected, to set up a rival 'Review,' and generally hectoring, bullying, and declaiming in a manner which gives one the highest opinion of the diplomatic skill of the editor, who managed, without truckling, to avoid a breach with his tremendous contributor. Brougham, indeed, was not quite blind to the fact that the 'Review' was as useful to him as he could be to the 'Review,' and was therefore more amenable than might have been expected in the last resort. But he was in every relation one of those men who are nearly as much hated and dreaded by their colleagues as by the adversary—a kind of irrepressible rocket, only too easy to discharge, but whose course defied prediction.

It is, however, admitted by everyone that the literary results of this portentous activity were essentially ephemeral. His writings are hopelessly commonplace in substance and slipshod in style. His garden offers a bushel of potatoes instead of a single peach. Much of Brougham's work was up to the level necessary to give effect to the manifesto of

an active politician. It was a forcible exposition of the arguments common at the time ; but it has nowhere that stamp of originality in thought or brilliance in expression which could confer upon it a permanent vitality.

Jeffrey and Sydney Smith deserve more respectful treatment. Macaulay speaks of his first editor with respectful enthusiasm. He says of the collected contributions that the 'variety and fertility of Jeffrey's mind' seem more extraordinary than ever. Scarcely could any three men have produced such 'diversified excellence.' 'When I compare him with Sydney and myself, I feel, with humility perfectly sincere, that his range is immeasurably wider than ours. And this is only as a writer. But he is not only a writer, he has been a great advocate, and he is a great judge. Take him all in all, I think him more nearly an universal genius than any man of our time ; certainly far more nearly than Brougham, much as Brougham affects the character.' Macaulay hated Brougham, and was, perhaps, a little unjust to him. But what are we to say of the writings upon which this panegyric is pronounced?

Jeffrey's collected articles include about eighty out of two hundred reviews, nearly all contributed to the 'Edinburgh' within its first period of twenty-five years. They fill four volumes, and are distributed under the seven heads—general literature, history, poetry, metaphysics, fiction, politics and miscellaneous. Certainly there is versatility enough implied in such a list, and we may be sure that he has ample opportunity for displaying whatever may be in him. It is, however, easy to dismiss some of these divisions. Jeffrey knew history as an English gentleman of average cultivation knew it ; that is to say, not enough to justify him in writing about it. He knew as much of meta-

physics as a clever lad was likely to pick up at Edinburgh during the reign of Dugald Stewart; his essays in that kind, though they show some aptitude and abundant confidence, do not now deserve serious attention. His chief speculative performance was an essay upon Beauty contributed to the 'Encyclopædia Britannica,' of which his biographer says quaintly that it is 'as sound as the subject admits of.' It is crude and meagre in substance. The principal conclusion is the rather unsatisfactory one for a professional critic, that there are no particular rules about beauty, and consequently that one taste is about as good as another. Nobody, however, could be less inclined to apply this over-liberal theory to questions of literary taste. There, he evidently holds there is most decidedly a right and wrong, and everybody is very plainly in the wrong who differs from himself.

Jeffrey's chief fame—or, should we say, notoriety?—was gained, and his merit should be tested by his success in this department. The greatest triumph that a literary critic can win is the early recognition of genius not yet appreciated by his contemporaries. The next test of his merit is his capacity for pronouncing sound judgment upon controversies which are fully before the public; and, finally, no inconsiderable merit must be allowed to any critic who has a vigorous taste of his own—not hopelessly eccentric or silly—and expresses it with true literary force. If not a judge, he may in that case be a useful advocate.

What can we say for Jeffrey upon this understanding? Did he ever encourage a rising genius? The sole approach to such a success is an appreciative notice of Keats, which would be the more satisfactory if poor Keats had not been previously assailed by the Opposition journal. The other

judgments are for the most part pronounced upon men already celebrated ; and the single phrase which has survived is the celebrated 'This will never do,' directed against Wordsworth's 'Excursion.' Every critic has a sacred and inalienable right to blunder at times : but Jeffrey's blundering is amazingly systematic and comprehensive. In the last of his poetical critiques (October 1829) he sums up his critical experience. He doubts whether Mrs. Hemans, whom he is reviewing at the time, will be immortal. 'The tuneful quartos of Southey,' he says, 'are already little better than lumber ; and the rich melodies of Keats and Shelley, and the fantastical emphasis of Wordsworth, and the plebeian pathos of Crabbe, are melting fast from the field of vision. The novels of Scott have put out his poetry. Even the splendid strains of Moore are fading into distance and dimness, except where they have been married to immortal music ; and the blazing star of Byron himself is receding from its place of pride.' Who survive this general decay? Not Coleridge, who is not even mentioned ; nor is Mrs. Hemans secure. The two who show least marks of decay are—of all people in the world—Rogers and Campbell ! It is only to be added that this summary was republished in 1843, by which time the true proportions of the great reputations of the period were becoming more obvious to an ordinary observer. It seems almost incredible now that any sane critic should pick out the poems of Rogers and Campbell as the sole enduring relics from the age of Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Coleridge, and Byron.

Doubtless a critic should rather draw the moral of his own fallibility than of his superiority to Jeffrey. Criticism is a still more perishable commodity than poetry. Jeffrey was a man of unusual intelligence and quickness of feeling ;

and a follower in his steps should think twice before he ventures to cast the first stone. If all critics who have grossly blundered are therefore to be pronounced utterly incompetent, we should, I fear, have to condemn nearly everyone who has taken up the profession. Not only Dennis and Rymer, but Dryden, Pope, Addison, Johnson, Gray, Wordsworth, Byron, and even Coleridge, down to the last new critic in the latest and most fashionable journals, would have to be censured. Still there are blunders and blunders ; and some of Jeffrey's sins in that kind are such as it is not very easy to forgive. If he attacked great men, it has been said in his defence, he attacked those parts of their writings which were really objectionable. And, of course, nobody will deny that (for example) Wordsworth's wilful and ostentatious inversion of accepted rules presented a very tempting mark to the critic. But—to say nothing of Jeffrey's failure to discharge adequately the correlative duty of generous praise—it must be admitted that his ridicule seems to strike pretty much at random. He picks out Southey, certainly the least eminent of the so-called school of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Lamb, as the one writer of the set whose poetry deserves serious consideration ; and, besides attacking Wordsworth's faults, his occasional flatness and childishness, selects some of his finest poems (*e.g.* the Ode on the Intimations of Immortality) as flagrant specimens of the hopelessly absurd.

The 'White Doe of Rylstone' may not be Wordsworth's best work, but a man who begins a review of it by proclaiming it to be 'the very worst poem ever imprinted in a quarto volume,' who follows up this remark by unmixed and indiscriminating abuse, and who publishes the review twenty-eight years later as expressing his mature convictions,

is certainly proclaiming his own gross incompetence. Or, again, Jeffrey writes about 'Wilhelm Meister' (in 1824), knowing its high reputation in Germany, and finds in it nothing but a text for a dissertation upon the amazing eccentricity of national taste which can admire 'sheer nonsense,' and at length proclaims himself tired of extracting 'so much trash.' There is a kind of indecency, a wanton disregard of the general consensus of opinion, in such treatment of a contemporary classic (then just translated by Carlyle, and so brought within Jeffrey's sphere) which one would hope to be now impossible. It is true that Jeffrey relents a little at the end, admits that Goethe has 'great talent,' and would like to withdraw some of his censure. Whilst, therefore, he regards the novel as an instance of that diversity of national taste which makes a writer idolised in one country who would not be tolerated in another, he would hold it out rather as an object of wonder than contempt. Though the greater part 'would not be endured, and, indeed, could not have been written in England,' there are many passages of which any country might naturally be proud. Truly this is an illustration of Jeffrey's fundamental principle, that taste has no laws, and is a matter of accidental caprice.

It may be said that better critics have erred with equal recklessness. De Quincey, who could be an admirable critic where his indolent prejudices were not concerned, is even more dead to the merits of Goethe. Byron's critical remarks are generally worth reading in spite of his wilful eccentricity; and he spoke of Wordsworth and Southey still more brutally than Jeffrey, and admired Rogers as unreasonably. In such cases we may admit the principle already suggested, that even the most reckless criticism has a kind

of value when it implies a genuine (even though a mistaken) taste. So long as a man says sincerely what he thinks, he tells us something worth knowing.

Unluckily, this is just where Jeffrey is apt to fail; though he affects to be a dictator, he is really a follower of the fashion. He could put up with Rogers's flattest 'correctness,' Moore's most intolerable tinsel, and even Southey's most ponderous epic poetry, because admiration was respectable. He could endorse, though rather coldly, the general verdict in Scott's favour, only guarding his dignity by some not too judicious criticism; preferring, for example, the sham romantic business of the 'Lay' to the incomparable vigour of the rough moss-troopers,

> Who sought the beeves that made their broth
> In Scotland and in England both—

terribly undignified lines, as Jeffrey thinks. So far, though his judicial swagger strikes us now as rather absurd, and we feel that he is passing sentence on bigger men than himself, he does fairly enough. But, unluckily, the 'Edinburgh' wanted a butt. All lively critical journals, it would seem, resemble the old-fashioned squires who kept a badger ready to be baited whenever a little amusement was desirable. The rising school of Lake poets, with their austere professions and real weaknesses, was just the game to show a little sport; and, accordingly, poor Jeffrey blundered into grievous misapprehensions, and has survived chiefly by his worst errors. The simple fact is that he accepted whatever seemed to a hasty observer to be the safest opinion, that which was current in the most orthodox critical circles, and expressed it with rather more point than his neighbours. But his criticism implies no serious thought or any deeper sentiment than pleasure at having found a good

laughing-stock. The most unmistakable bit of genuine expression of his own feelings in Jeffrey's writings is, I think, to be found in his letters to Dickens. 'Oh! my dear, dear Dickens!' he exclaims, 'what a No. 5' (of 'Dombey and Son') 'you have now given us. I have so cried and sobbed over it last night and again this morning, and felt my heart purified by those tears, and blessed and loved you for making me shed them; and I never can bless and love you enough. Since that divine Nelly was found dead on her humble couch, beneath the snow and ivy, there has been nothing like the actual dying of that sweet Paul in the summer sunshine of that lofty room.' The emotion is a little senile, and most of us think it exaggerated; but at least it is genuine. The earlier thunders of the 'Edinburgh Review' have lost their terrors, because they are in fact mere echoes of commonplace opinion. They are often clever enough, and have all the air of judicial authority, but we feel that they are empty shams, concealing no solid core of strong personal feeling, even of the perverse variety. The critic has been asking himself not 'What do I feel?' but 'What is the correct remark to make?'

Jeffrey's political writing suggests, I think, in some respects a higher estimate of his merits. He has not, it is true, very strong convictions, but his sentiments are liberal in the better sense of the word, and he has a more philosophical tone than is usual with English publicists. He appreciates the truths, now become commonplace, that the political constitution of the country should be developed so as to give free play for the underlying social forces without breaking abruptly with the old traditions. He combats with dignity the narrow prejudices which led to a policy of rigid repression, and which, in his opinion, could

only lead to revolution. But the effect of his principles is not a little marred by a certain timidity both of character and intellect. Hopefulness should be the mark of an ardent reformer, and Jeffrey seems to be always decided by his fears. His favourite topic is the advantage of a strong middle party, for he is terribly afraid of a collision between the two extremes ; he can only look forward to despotism if the Tories triumph, and a sweeping revolution if they are beaten. Meanwhile, for many years he thinks it most probable that both parties will be swallowed up by the common enemy. Never was there such a determined croaker. In 1808 he suspects that Bonaparte will be in Dublin in about fifteen months, when he, if he survives, will try to go to America. In 1811 he expects Bonaparte to be in Ireland in eighteen months, and asks how England can then be kept, and whether it would be worth keeping? France is certain to conquer the Continent, and our interference will only 'exasperate and accelerate.' Bonaparte's invasion of Russia in 1813 made him still more gloomy. He rejoiced at the French defeat as one delivered from a great terror, but the return of the Emperor dejects him again. All he can say of the war (just before Waterloo) is that he is 'mortally afraid of it,' and that he hates Bonaparte 'because he makes me more afraid than anybody else.' In 1829 he anticipates 'tragical scenes' and a sanguinary revolution ; in 1821 he thinks as ill as ever 'of the state and prospects of the country,' though with less alarm of speedy mischief ; and in 1822 he looks forward to revolutionary wars all over the Continent, from which we may possibly escape by reason of our 'miserable poverty ;' whilst it is probable that our old tyrannies and corruptions will last for some 4,000 or 5,000 years longer.

A stalwart politician, Whig or Tory, is rarely developed out of a Mr. Much-Afraid or a Mr. Despondency ; they are too closely related to Mr. Facing-both-Ways. Jeffrey thinks it generally a duty to conceal his fears and affect a confidence which he does not feel ; but perhaps the best piece of writing in his essays is that in which he for once gives full expression to his pessimist sentiment. It occurs in a review of a book in which Madame de Staël maintains the doctrine of human perfectibility. Jeffrey explains his more despondent view in a really eloquent passage. He thinks that the increase of educated intelligence will not diminish the permanent causes of human misery. War will be as common as ever, wealth will be used with at least equal selfishness, luxury and dissipation will increase, enthusiasm will diminish, intellectual originality will become rarer, the division of labour will make men's lives pettier and more mechanical, and pauperism grow with the development of manufactures. When republishing his essays Jeffrey expresses his continued adherence to these views, and they are more interesting than most of his work, because they have at least the merits of originality and sincerity. Still, one cannot help observing that if the 'Edinburgh Review' was an efficient organ of progress, it was not from any ardent faith in progress entertained by its chief conductor.

It is a relief to turn from Jeffrey to Sydney Smith. The highest epithet applicable to Jeffrey is 'clever,' to which we may prefix some modest intensitive. He is a brilliant, versatile, and at bottom liberal and kindly man of the world ; but he never gets fairly beyond the border-line which irrevocably separates lively talent from original power. There are dozens of writers who could turn out work on the same pattern and about equally good. Smith, on the other

hand, stamps all his work with his peculiar characteristics. It is original and unmistakable ; and in a certain department —not, of course, a very high one—he has almost unique merits. I do not think that the 'Plymley Letters' can be surpassed by anything in the language as specimens of the terse, effective treatment of a great subject in language suitable for popular readers. Of course they have no pretence to the keen polish of Junius, or the weight of thought of Burke, or the rhetorical splendours of Milton ; but their humour, freshness, and spirit are inimitable. The 'Drapier Letters,' to which they have often been compared, were more effective at the moment ; but no fair critic can deny, I think, that Sydney Smith's performance is now more interesting than Swift's.

The comparison between the Dean and the Canon is an obvious one, and has often been made. There is a likeness in the external history of the two clergymen who both sought for preferment through politics, and were both, even by friends, felt to have sinned against professional proprieties, and were put off with scanty rewards in consequence. Both, too, were masters of a vigorous style, and original humourists. But the likeness does not go very deep. Swift had the most powerful intellect and the strongest passion as undeniably as Smith had the sweetest nature. The admirable good-humour with which Smith accepted his position and devoted himself to honest work in an obscure country parish, is the strongest contrast with Swift's misanthropical seclusion ; and nothing can be less like than Smith's admirable domestic history and the mysterious love affairs with Stella and Vanessa. Smith's character reminds us more closely of Fuller, whose peculiar humour is much of the same stamp ; and who, falling upon

hard times, and therefore tinged by a more melancholy sentiment, yet showed the same unconquerable cheerfulness and intellectual vivacity.

Most of Sydney Smith's 'Edinburgh' articles are of a very slight texture, though the reader is rewarded by an occasional turn of characteristic quaintness. The criticism is of the most simple-minded kind; but here and there crops up a comment which is irresistibly comic. Here, for example, is a quaint passage from a review of Waterton's 'Wanderings':—

> How astonishing are the freaks and fancies of nature! To what purpose, we say, is a bird placed in the woods of Cayenne, with a bill a yard long, making a noise like a puppy-dog, and laying eggs in hollow trees? To be sure, the toucan might retort, To what purpose were gentlemen in Bond Street created? To what purpose were certain members of Parliament created, pestering the House of Commons with their ignorance and folly, and impeding the business of the country? There is no end of such questions. So we will not enter into the metaphysics of the toucan.

Smith's humour is most aptly used to give point to the vigorous logic of a thoroughly healthy nature, contemptuous of all nonsense, full of shrewd common-sense, and righteously indignant in the presence of all injustice and outworn abuse. It would be difficult to find anywhere a more brilliant assault upon the prejudices which defend established grievances than the inimitable 'Noodle's Oration,' into which Smith has compressed the pith of Bentham's 'Book of Fallacies.' There is a certain resemblance between the logic of Smith and Macaulay, both of whom, it must be admitted, are rather given to proving commonplaces and inclined to remain on the surface of things. Smith, like Macaulay, fully understands the advantage of putting the concrete for the abstract, and hammering obvious truths

into men's heads by dint of homely explanation. Smith's memory does not supply so vast a store of parallels as that upon which Macaulay could draw so freely; but his humorous illustrations are more amusing and effective. There could not be a happier way of putting the argument for what may be called the lottery system of endowments than the picture of the respectable baker driving past Northumberland House to St. Paul's Churchyard, and speculating on the chance of elevating his 'little muffin-faced son' to a place among the Percies or the highest seat in the Cathedral. Macaulay would have enforced his reasoning by a catalogue of successful ecclesiastics. The folly of alienating Catholic sympathies, during our great struggle, by maintaining the old disabilities, is brought out with equal skill by the apologue in the 'Plymley Letters' of the orthodox captain of a frigate in a dangerous action, securing twenty or thirty of his crew, who happened to be Papists, under a Protestant guard; reminding his sailors, in a bitter harangue, that they are of different religions; exhorting the Episcopal gunner to distrust the Presbyterian quartermaster; rushing through blood and brains to examine his men in the Thirty-nine Articles, and forbidding any one to spunge or ram who has not taken the sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England. It is quite another question whether Smith really penetrates to the bottom of the dispute; but the only fault to be found with his statement of the case, as he saw it, is that it makes it rather too clear. The arguments are never all on one side in any political question, and the writer who sees absolutely no difficulty, suggests to a wary reader that he is ignoring something relevant. Still, this is hardly an objection to a popular advocate, and it is fair to add that Smith's logic

is not more admirable than the hearty generosity of his sympathy with the oppressed Catholic. The appeal to cowardice is lost in the appeal to true philanthropic sentiment.

With all his merits, there is a less favourable side to Smith's advocacy. When he was condemned as being too worldly and facetious for a priest, it was easy to retort that humour is not of necessity irreligious. It might be added that in his writings it is strictly subservient to solid argument. In a London party he might throw the reins upon the neck of his fancy and go on playing with a ludicrous image till his audience felt the agony of laughter to be really painful. In his writings he aims almost as straight at his mark as Swift, and is never diverted by the spirit of pure fun. The humour always illuminates well-strung logic. But the scandal was not quite groundless. When he directs his powers against sheer obstruction and antiquated prejudice —against abuses in prisons, or the game-laws, or education— we can have no fault to find ; nor is it fair to condemn a reviewer because in all these questions he is a follower rather than a leader. It is enough if he knows a good cause when he sees it, and does his best to back up reformers in the press, though hardly a working reformer, and certainly not an originator of reform. But it is less easy to excuse his want of sympathy for the reformers themselves.

If there is one thing which Sydney Smith dreads and dislikes, it is enthusiasm. Nobody would deny, at the present day, that the zeal which supplied the true leverage for some of the greatest social reforms of the time was to be found chiefly amongst the so-called Evangelicals and Methodists. For them Smith has nothing but the heartiest aversion. He is always having a quiet jest at the religious sentiments of Perceval or Wilberforce, and his most pro-

minent articles in the 'Review' were a series of inexcusably bitter attacks upon the Methodists. He is thoroughly alarmed and disgusted by their progress. He thinks them likely to succeed, and says that, if they succeed, 'happiness will be destroyed, reason degraded, and sound religion banished from the world,' and that a reign of fanaticism will be succeeded by 'a long period of the grossest immorality, atheism, and debauchery.' He is not sure that any remedy or considerable palliative is possible, but he suggests, as hopeful, the employment of ridicule, and applies it himself most unsparingly. When the Methodists try to convert the Hindoos, he attacks them furiously for endangering the empire. They naturally reply that a Christian is bound to propagate his belief. The answer, says Smith, is short: 'It is not Christianity which is introduced (into India), but the debased nonsense and mummery of the Methodists, which has little more to do with the Christian religion than it has to do with the religion of China.' The missionaries, he says, are so foolish, 'that the natives almost instinctively duck and pelt them,' as, one cannot help remembering, missionaries of an earlier Christian era have been ducked and pelted. He pronounces the enterprise to be hopeless and cruel, and clenches his argument by a statement which sounds strangely enough in the mouth of a sincere Christian:—

> Let us ask (he says), if the Bible is universally diffused in Hindostan, what must be the astonishment of the natives to find that we are forbidden to rob, murder, and steal—we who, in fifty years, have extended our empire from a few acres about Madras over the whole peninsula and sixty millions of people, and exemplified in our public conduct every crime of which human nature is capable? What matchless impudence, to follow up such practice with such precepts! If we have common prudence, let us keep the Gospel at home, and tell them that Machiavel is our prophet and the god of the Manichæans our god.

We are to make our practice consistent by giving up our virtues instead of our vices. Of course, Smith ends his article by a phrase about 'the slow, solid and temperate introduction of Christianity;' but the Methodists might well feel that the 'matchless impudence' was not all on their side, and that this Christian priest, had he lived some centuries earlier, would have sympathised a good deal more with Gallio than with St. Paul.

It is a question which I need not here discuss how far Smith could be justified in his ridicule of men who, with all their undeniable absurdity, were at least zealous believers in the creed which he—as is quite manifest—held in all sincerity. But one remark is obvious; the Edinburgh Reviewers justify, to a certain point, the claim put forward by Sydney Smith; they condemned many crying abuses, and condemned them heartily. They condemned them as thoroughly sensible men of the world, animated partly by a really generous sentiment, partly by a tacit scepticism as to the value of the protected interests, and above all by the strong conviction that it was quite essential for the middle party—that is, for the bulk of the respectable well-bred classes—to throw overboard gross abuses which afforded so many points of attack to thoroughgoing radicals. On the other hand, they were quite indifferent or openly hostile to most of the new forces which stirred men's minds. They patronised political economy because Malthus began by opposing the revolutionary dreams of Godwin and his like. But every one of the great impulses of the time was treated by them in an antagonistic spirit. They savagely ridiculed Coleridge, the great seminal mind of one philosophical school; they fiercely attacked Bentham and James Mill, the great leaders of the antagonist school; they were equally

opposed to the Evangelicals who revered Wilberforce, and, in later times, to the religious party, of which Dr. Newman was the great ornament; in poetry they clung, as long as they could, to the safe old principles represented by Crabbe and Rogers; they covered Wordsworth and Coleridge with almost unmixed ridicule, ignored Shelley, and were only tender to Byron and Scott because Scott and Byron were fashionable idols. The truth is, that it is a mistake to suppose that the eighteenth century ended with the year 1800. It lasted in the upper currents of opinion till at least 1832. Sydney Smith's theology is that of Paley and the common-sense divines of the previous period. Jeffrey's politics were but slightly in advance of the true old Whigs, who still worshipped according to the tradition of their fathers in Holland House. The ideal of the party was to bring the practice of the country up to the theory whose main outlines had been accepted in the Revolution of 1688; and they studiously shut their eyes to any newer intellectual and social movements.

I do not say this by way of simple condemnation; for we have daily more reason to acknowledge the immense value of calm, clear common-sense, which sees the absurd side of even the best impulses. But it is necessary to bear the fact in mind when estimating such claims as those put forward by Sydney Smith. The truth seems to be that the 'Edinburgh Review' enormously raised the tone of periodical literature at the time, by opening an arena for perfectly independent discussion. Its great merit, at starting, was that it was no mere publisher's organ, like its rivals, and that it paid contributors well enough to attract the most rising talent of the day. As the 'Review' progressed its capacities became more generally understood, and its

writers, as they rose to eminence and attracted new allies, put more genuine work into articles certain to obtain a wide circulation and to come with great authority. This implies a long step towards the development of the present system, whose merits and defects would deserve a full discussion—the system according to which much of the most solid and original work of the time first appears in periodicals. The tone of periodicals has been enormously raised, but the effect upon general literature may be more questionable. But the 'Edinburgh' was not in its early years a journal with a mission, or the organ of an enthusiastic sect. Rather it was the instrument used by a number of very clever young men to put forward the ideas current in the more liberal section of the upper classes, with much occasional vigour and a large infusion of common-sense, but also with abundant flippancy and superficiality, and, in a literary sense, without that solidity of workmanship which is essential for enduring vitality.

WORDSWORTH'S ETHICS

UNDER every poetry, it has been said, there lies a philosophy. Rather, it may almost be said, every poetry is a philosophy. The poet and the philosopher live in the same world and are interested in the same truths. What is the nature of man and the world in which he lives, and what, in consequence, should be our conduct? These are the great problems, the answers to which may take a religious, a poetical, a philosophical, or an artistic form. The difference is that the poet has intuitions, while the philosopher gives demonstrations; that the thought which in one mind is converted into emotion, is in the other resolved into logic; and that a symbolic representation of the idea is substituted for a direct expression. The normal relation is exhibited in the case of the anatomist and the sculptor. The artist intuitively recognises the most perfect form; the man of science analyses the structural relations by which it is produced. Though the two provinces are concentric, they are not coincident. The reasoner is interested in many details which have no immediate significance for the man of feeling; and the poetic insight, on the other hand, is capable of recognising subtle harmonies and discords of which our crude instruments of weighing and measuring are incapable of revealing the secret. But the connection is so close that the greatest works of either kind seem to have

a double nature. A philosophy may, like Spinoza's, be apparelled in the most technical and abstruse panoply of logic, and yet the total impression may stimulate a religious sentiment as effectively as any poetic or theosophic mysticism. Or a great imaginative work, like Shakespeare's, may present us with the most vivid concrete symbols, and yet suggest, as forcibly as the formal demonstrations of a metaphysician, the idealist conviction that the visible and tangible world is a dream-woven tissue covering infinite and inscrutable mysteries. In each case the highest intellectual faculty manifests itself in the vigour with which certain profound conceptions of the world and life have been grasped and assimilated. In each case that man is greatest who soars habitually to the highest regions and gazes most steadily upon the widest horizons of time and space. The logical consistency which frames all dogmas into a consistent whole, is but another aspect of the imaginative power which harmonises the strongest and subtlest emotions excited.

The task, indeed, of deducing the philosophy from the poetry, of inferring what a man thinks from what he feels, may at times perplex the acutest critic. Nor, if it were satisfactorily accomplished, could we infer that the best philosopher is also the best poet. Absolute incapacity for poetical expression may be combined with the highest philosophic power. All that can safely be said is that a man's thoughts, whether embodied in symbols or worked out in syllogisms, are more valuable in proportion as they indicate greater philosophical insight ; and therefore that, *ceteris paribus*, that man is the greater poet whose imagination is most transfused with reason ; who has the deepest truths to proclaim as well as the strongest feelings to utter.

Some theorists implicitly deny this principle by holding

substantially that the poet's function is simply the utterance of a particular mood, and that, if he utters it forcibly and delicately, we have no more to ask. Even so, we should not admit that the thoughts suggested to a wise man by a prospect of death and eternity are of just equal value, if equally well expressed, with the thoughts suggested to a fool by the contemplation of a good dinner. But, in practice, the utterance of emotions can hardly be dissociated from the assertion of principles. Psychologists have shown, ever since the days of Berkeley, that when a man describes (as he thinks) a mere sensation, and says, for example, 'I see a house,' he is really recording the result of a complex logical process. A great painter and the dullest observer may have the same impressions of coloured blotches upon their retina. The great man infers the true nature of the objects which produce his sensations, and can therefore represent the objects accurately. The other sees only with his eyes, and can therefore represent nothing. There is thus a logic implied even in the simplest observation, and one which can be tested by mathematical rules as distinctly as a proposition in geometry.

When we have to find a language for our emotions instead of our sensations, we generally express the result of an incomparably more complex set of intellectual operations. The poet, in uttering his joy or sadness, often implies, in the very form of his language, a whole philosophy of life or of the universe. The explanation is given at the end of Shakespeare's familiar passage about the poet's eye :—

> Such tricks hath strong imagination,
> That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
> It comprehends some bringer of that joy ;
> Or in the night, imagining some fear,
> How easy is a bush supposed a bear !

The *ap*prehension of the passion, as Shakespeare logically says, is a *com*prehension of its cause. The imagination reasons. The bare faculty of sight involves thought and feeling. The symbol which the fancy spontaneously constructs, implies a whole world of truth or error, of superstitious beliefs or sound philosophy. The poetry holds a number of intellectual dogmas in solution ; and it is precisely due to these general dogmas, which are true and important for us as well as for the poet, that his power over our sympathies is due. If his philosophy has no power in it, his emotions lose their hold upon our minds, or interest us only as antiquarians and lovers of the picturesque. But in the briefest poems of a true thinker we read the essence of the life-long reflections of a passionate and intellectual nature. Fears and hopes common to all thoughtful men have been coined into a single phrase. Even in cases where no definite conviction is expressed or even implied, and the poem is simply, like music, an indefinite utterance of a certain state of the emotions, we may discover an intellectual element. The rational and the emotional nature have such intricate relations that one cannot exist in great richness and force without justifying an inference as to the other. From a single phrase, as from a single gesture, we can often go far to divining the character of a man's thoughts and feelings. We know more of a man from five minutes' talk than from pages of what is called 'psychological analysis.' From a passing expression on the face, itself the result of variations so minute as to defy all analysis, we instinctively frame judgments as to a man's temperament and habitual modes of thought and conduct. Indeed, such judgments, if erroneous, determine us only too exclusively in the most important relations of life.

Now the highest poetry is that which expresses the richest, most powerful, and most susceptible emotional nature, and the most versatile, penetrative, and subtle intellect. Such qualities may be stamped upon trifling work. The great artist can express his power within the limits of a coin or a gem. The great poet will reveal his character through a sonnet or a song. Shakespeare, or Milton, or Burns, or Wordsworth can express his whole mode of feeling within a few lines. An ill-balanced nature reveals itself by a discord, as an illogical mind by a fallacy. A man need not compose an epic on a system of philosophy to write himself down an ass. And, inversely, a great mind and a noble nature may show itself by impalpable but recognisable signs within the 'sonnet's scanty plot of ground.' Once more, the highest poetry must be that which expresses not only the richest but the healthiest nature. Disease means an absence or a want of balance of certain faculties, and therefore leads to false reasoning or emotional discord. The defect of character betrays itself in some erroneous mode of thought or baseness of sentiment. And since morality means obedience to those rules which are most essential to the spiritual health, vicious feeling indicates some morbid tendency, and is so far destructive of the poetical faculty. An immoral sentiment is the sign either of a false judgment of the world and of human nature, or of a defect in the emotional nature which shows itself by a discord or an indecorum, and leads to a cynicism or indecency which offends the reason through the taste. What is called immorality does not indeed always imply such defects. Sound moral intuitions may be opposed to the narrow code prevalent at the time; or a protest against puritanical or ascetic perversions of the standard may hurry

the poet into attacks upon true principles. And, again, the keen sensibility which makes a man a poet, undoubtedly exposes him to certain types of disease. He is more likely than his thick-skinned neighbour to be vexed by evil, and to be drawn into distorted views of life by an excess of sympathy or indignation. Injudicious admirers prize the disease instead of the strength from which it springs ; and value the cynicism or the despair instead of the contempt for heartless commonplace or the desire for better things with which it was unfortunately connected. A strong moral sentiment has a great value, even when forced into an unnatural alliance. Nay, even when it is, so to speak, inverted, it often receives a kind of paradoxical value from its efficacy against some opposite form of error. It is only a complete absence of the moral faculty which is irredeemably bad. The poet in whom it does not exist is condemned to the lower sphere, and can only deal with the deepest feelings on penalty of shocking us by indecency or profanity. A man who can revel in 'Epicurus' stye' without even the indirect homage to purity of remorse and bitterness, can do nothing but gratify our lowest passions. They, perhaps, have their place, and the man who is content with such utterances may not be utterly worthless. But to place him on a level with his betters is to confound every sound principle of criticism.

It follows that a kind of collateral test of poetical excellence may be found by extracting the philosophy from the poetry. The test is, of course, inadequate. A good philosopher may be an execrable poet. Even stupidity is happily not inconsistent with sound doctrine, though inconsistent with a firm grasp of ultimate principles. But the vigour with which a man grasps and assimilates a deep

moral doctrine is a test of the degree in which he possesses one essential condition of the higher poetical excellence. A continuous illustration of this principle is given in the poetry of Wordsworth, who, indeed, has expounded his ethical and philosophical views so explicitly, one would rather not say so ostentatiously, that great part of the work is done to our hands. Nowhere is it easier to observe the mode in which poetry and philosophy spring from the same root and owe their excellence to the same intellectual powers. So much has been said by the ablest critics of the purely poetical side of Wordsworth's genius, that I may willingly renounce the difficult task of adding or repeating. I gladly take for granted—what is generally acknowledged—that Wordsworth in his best moods reaches a greater height than any other modern Englishman. The word 'inspiration' is less forced when applied to his loftiest poetry than when used of any of his contemporaries. With defects too obvious to be mentioned, he can yet pierce furthest behind the veil ; and embody most efficiently the thoughts and emotions which come to us in our most solemn and reflective moods. Other poetry becomes trifling when we are making our inevitable passages through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Wordsworth's alone retains its power. We love him the more as we grow older and become more deeply impressed with the sadness and seriousness of life ; we are apt to grow weary of his rivals when we have finally quitted the regions of youthful enchantment. And I take the explanation to be that he is not merely a melodious writer, or a powerful utterer of deep emotion, but a true philosopher. His poetry wears well because it has solid substance. He is a prophet and a moralist as well as a mere singer. His ethical system, in par-

ticular, is as distinctive and capable of systematic exposition as that of Butler. By endeavouring to state it in plain prose we shall see how the poetical power implies a sensitiveness to ideas which, when extracted from the symbolical embodiment, fall spontaneously into a scientific system of thought.

There are two opposite types to which all moral systems tend. They correspond to the two great intellectual families to which every man belongs by right of birth. One class of minds is distinguished by its firm grasp of facts, by its reluctance to drop solid substance for the loveliest shadows, and by its preference of concrete truths to the most symmetrical of theories. In ethical questions the tendency of such minds is to consider man as a being impelled by strong but unreasonable passions towards tangible objects. He is a loving, hating, thirsting, hungering—anything but a reasoning—being. As Swift—a typical example of this intellectual temperament—declared, man is not an *animal rationale*, but at most *capax rationis*. At bottom, he is a machine worked by blind instincts. Their tendency cannot be deduced by *à priori* reasoning, though reason may calculate the consequences of indulging them. The passions are equally good, so far as equally pleasurable. Virtue means that course of conduct which secures the maximum of pleasure. Fine theories about abstract rights and correspondence to eternal truths are so many words. They provide decent masks for our passions ; they do not really govern them, or alter their nature, but they cover the ugly brutal selfishness of mankind, and soften the shock of conflicting interests. Such a view has something in it congenial to the English love of reality and contempt for shams. It may be represented by Swift or Mandeville in the last century ; in poetry it corresponds to the theory

attributed by some critics to Shakespeare ; in a tranquil and reasoning mind it leads to the utilitarianism of Bentham ; in a proud, passionate, and imaginative mind it manifests itself in such a poem as 'Don Juan.' Its strength is in its grasp of fact ; its weakness, in its tendency to cynicism. Opposed to this is the school which starts from abstract reason. It prefers to dwell in the ideal world, where principles may be contemplated apart from the accidents which render them obscure to vulgar minds. It seeks to deduce the moral code from eternal truths without seeking for a groundwork in the facts of experience. If facts refuse to conform to theories, it proposes that facts should be summarily abolished. Though the actual human being is, unfortunately, not always reasonable, it holds that pure reason must be in the long run the dominant force, and that it reveals the laws to which mankind will ultimately conform. The revolutionary doctrine of the 'rights of man' expressed one form of this doctrine, and showed in the most striking way a strength and weakness, which are the converse of those exhibited by its antagonist. It was strong as appealing to the loftier motives of justice and sympathy ; and weak as defying the appeal to experience. The most striking example in English literature is in Godwin's 'Political Justice.' The existing social order is to be calmly abolished because founded upon blind prejudice ; the constituent atoms called men are to be rearranged in an ideal order as in a mathematical diagram. Shelley gives the translation of this theory into poetry. The 'Revolt of Islam' or the 'Prometheus Unbound,' with all its unearthly beauty, wearies the imagination which tries to soar into the thin air of Shelley's dreamworld ; just as the intellect, trying to apply the abstract formulæ of political

metaphysics to any concrete problem, feels as though it were under an exhausted receiver. In both cases we seem to have got entirely out of the region of real human passions and senses into a world, beautiful perhaps, but certainly impalpable.

The great aim of moral philosophy is to unite the disjoined element, to end the divorce between reason and experience, and to escape from the alternative of dealing with empty but symmetrical formulæ or concrete and chaotic facts. No hint can be given here as to the direction in which a final solution must be sought. Whatever the true method, Wordsworth's mode of concciving the problem shows how powerfully he grasped the questions at issue. If his doctrines are not systematically expounded, they all have a direct bearing upon the real difficulties involved. They are stated so forcibly in his noblest poems that we might almost express a complete theory in his own language. But, without seeking to make a collection of aphorisms from his poetry, we may indicate the cardinal points of his teaching.[1]

The most characteristic of all his doctrines is that which is embodied in the great ode upon the 'Intimations of Immortality.' The doctrine itself—the theory that the instincts of childhood testify to the pre-existence of the soul —sounds fanciful enough ; and Wordsworth took rather unnecessary pains to say that he did not hold it as a serious dogma. We certainly need not ask whether it is reasonable or orthodox to believe that 'our birth is but a sleep and a

[1] J. S. Mill and Whewell were, for their generation, the ablest exponents of two opposite systems of thought upon such matters. Mill has expressed his obligations to Wordsworth in his 'Autobiography,' and Whewell dedicated to Wordsworth his 'Elements of Morality' in acknowledgment of his influence as a moralist.

forgetting.' The fact symbolised by the poetic fancy—the glory and freshness of our childish instincts—is equally noteworthy, whatever its cause. Some modern reasoners would explain its significance by reference to a very different kind of pre-existence. The instincts, they would say, are valuable, because they register the accumulated and inherited experience of past generations. Wordsworth's delight in wild scenery is regarded by them as due to the 'combination of states that were organised in the race during barbarous times, when its pleasurable activities were amongst the mountains, woods, and waters.' In childhood we are most completely under the dominion of these inherited impulses. The correlation between the organism and its medium is then most perfect, and hence the peculiar theme of childish communion with nature.

Wordsworth would have repudiated the doctrine with disgust. He would have been 'on the side of the angels.' No memories of the savage and the monkey, but the reminiscences of the once-glorious soul could explain his emotions. Yet there is this much in common between him and the men of science whom he denounced with too little discrimination. The fact of the value of these primitive instincts is admitted, and admitted for the same purpose. Man, it is agreed, is furnished with sentiments which cannot be explained as the result of his individual experience. They may be intelligible, according to the evolutionist, when regarded as embodying the past experience of the race ; or, according to Wordsworth, as implying a certain mysterious faculty imprinted upon the soul. The scientific doctrine, whether sound or not, has modified the whole mode of approaching ethical problems ; and Wordsworth, though with a very different purpose, gives a new emphasis to the

facts, upon a recognition of which, according to some theorists, must be based the reconciliation of the great rival schools—the intuitionists and the utilitarians. The parallel may at first sight seem fanciful ; and it would be too daring to claim for Wordsworth the discovery of the most remarkable phenomenon which modern psychology must take into account. There is, however, a real connection between the two doctrines, though in one sense they are almost antithetical. Meanwhile we observe that the same sensibility which gives poetical power is necessary to the scientific observer. The magic of the ode, and of many other passages in Wordsworth's poetry, is due to his recognition of this mysterious efficacy of our childish instincts. He gives emphasis to one of the most striking facts of our spiritual experience, which had passed with little notice from professed psychologists. He feels what they afterwards tried to explain.

The full meaning of the doctrine comes out as we study Wordsworth more thoroughly. Other poets—almost all poets—have dwelt fondly upon recollections of childhood. But not feeling so strongly, and therefore not expressing so forcibly, the peculiar character of the emotion, they have not derived the same lessons from their observation. The Epicurean poets are content with Herrick's simple moral—

> Gather ye rosebuds while ye may—

and with his simple explanation—

> That age is best which is the first,
> When youth and blood are warmer.

Others more thoughtful look back upon the early days with the passionate regret of Byron's verses :

> There's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away,
> When the glow of early thought declines in feeling's dull decay ;

'Tis not on youth's smooth cheek the blush alone which fades so fast,
But the tender bloom of heart is gone, ere youth itself be past.

Such painful longings for the 'tender grace of a day that is dead' are spontaneous and natural. Every healthy mind feels the pang in proportion to the strength of its affections. But it is also true that the regret resembles too often the maudlin meditation of a fast young man over his morning's soda-water. It implies, that is, a non-recognition of the higher uses to which the fading memories may still be put. A different tone breathes in Shelley's pathetic but rather hectic moralisings, and his lamentations over the departure of the 'spirit of delight.' Nowhere has it found more exquisite expression than in the marvellous 'Ode to the West Wind.' These magical verses—his best, as it seems to me—describe the reflection of the poet's own mind in the strange stir and commotion of a dying winter's day. They represent, we may say, the fitful melancholy which oppresses a noble spirit when it has recognised the difficulty of forcing facts into conformity with the ideal. He still clings to the hope that his 'dead thoughts' may be driven over the universe,

Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth.

But he bows before the inexorable fate which has cramped his energies:

A heavy weight of years has chained and bowed
One too like thee; tameless and swift and proud.

Neither Byron nor Shelley can see any satisfactory solution, and therefore neither can reach a perfect harmony of feeling. The world seems to them to be out of joint, because they have not known how to accept the inevitable, nor to conform to the discipline of facts. And, therefore,

however intense the emotion, and however exquisite its expression, we are left in a state of intellectual and emotional discontent. Such utterances may suit us in youth, when we can afford to play with sorrow. As we grow older we feel a certain emptiness in them. A true man ought not to sit down and weep with an exhausted debauchee. He cannot afford to confess himself beaten with the idealist who has discovered that Rome was not built in a day, nor revolutions made with rose-water. He has to work as long as he has strength; to work in spite of, even by strength of, sorrow, disappointment, wounded vanity, and blunted sensibilities; and therefore he must search for some profounder solution for the dark riddle of life.

This solution it is Wordsworth's chief aim to supply. In the familiar verses which stand as a motto to his poems—

> The child is father to the man,
> And I could wish my days to be
> Bound each to each by natural piety—

the great problem of life, that is, as he conceives it, is to secure a continuity between the period at which we are guided by half-conscious instincts, and that in which a man is able to supply the place of these primitive impulses by reasoned convictions. This is the thought which comes over and over again in his deepest poems, and round which all his teaching centred. It supplies the great moral, for example, of the 'Leech-gatherer:'

> My whole life I have lived in pleasant thought,
> As if life's business were a summer mood:
> As if all needful things would come unsought
> To genial faith still rich in genial good.

When his faith is tried by harsh experience, the leech-gatherer comes,

> Like a man from some far region sent
> To give me human strength by apt admonishment ;

for he shows how the 'genial faith' may be converted into permanent strength by resolution and independence. The verses most commonly quoted, such as—

> We poets in our youth begin in gladness,
> But thereof come in the end despondency and sadness,

give the ordinary view of the sickly school. Wordsworth's aim is to supply an answer worthy not only of a poet, but a man. The same sentiment again is expressed in the grand 'Ode to Duty,' where the

> Stern daughter of the voice of God

is invoked to supply that 'genial sense of youth' which has hitherto been a sufficient guidance ; or in the majestic morality of the 'Happy Warrior ;' or in the noble verses on 'Tintern Abbey ;' or, finally, in the great ode which gives most completely the whole theory of that process by which our early intuitions are to be transformed into settled principles of feeling and action.

Wordsworth's philosophical theory, in short, depends upon the asserted identity between our childish instincts and our enlightened reason. The doctrine of a state of pre-existence as it appears in other writers—as, for example, in the Cambridge Platonists [1]—was connected with an obsolete metaphysical system, and the doctrine—exploded in its old form—of innate ideas. Wordsworth does not attribute any such preternatural character to the 'blank misgivings' and 'shadowy recollections' of which he speaks. They are invaluable data of our spiritual experience ; but

[1] The poem of Henry Vaughan, to which reference is often made in this connection, scarcely contains more than a pregnant hint.

they do not entitle us to lay down dogmatic propositions independently of experience. They are spontaneous products of a nature in harmony with the universe in which it is placed, and inestimable as a clear indication that such a harmony exists. To interpret and regulate them belongs to the reasoning faculty and the higher imagination of later years. If he does not quite distinguish between the province of reason and emotion — the most difficult of philosophical problems — he keeps clear of the cruder mysticism, because he does not seek to elicit any definite formulæ from those admittedly vague forebodings which lie on the borderland between the two sides of our nature. With his invariable sanity of mind, he more than once notices the difficulty of distinguishing between that which nature teaches us and the interpretations which we impose upon nature.[1] He carefully refrains from pressing the inference too far.

The teaching, indeed, assumes that view of the universe which is implied in his pantheistic language. The Divinity really reveals Himself in the lonely mountains and the starry heavens. By contemplating them we are able to rise into that 'blessed mood' in which for a time the burden of the mystery is rolled off our souls, and we can 'see into the life of things.' And here we must admit that Wordsworth is not entirely free from the weakness which generally besets thinkers of this tendency. Like Shaftesbury in the previous century, who speaks of the universal harmony as emphatically though not as poetically as Wordsworth, he is tempted to adopt a too facile optimism. He seems at times to have overlooked that dark side of nature which is recognised in theological doctrines of corruption, or in the scientific

[1] As, for example, in the *Lines on Tintern Abbey*: 'If this be but a vain belief.'

theories about the fierce struggle for existence. Can we in fact say that these early instincts prove more than the happy constitution of the individual who feels them? Is there not a teaching of nature very apt to suggest horror and despair rather than a complacent brooding over soothing thoughts? Do not the mountains which Wordsworth loved so well, speak of decay and catastrophe in every line of their slopes? Do they not suggest the helplessness and narrow limitations of man, as forcibly as his possible exaltation? The awe which they strike into our souls has its terrible as well as its amiable side; and in moods of depression the darker aspect becomes more conspicuous than the brighter. Nay, if we admit that we have instincts which are the very substance of all that afterwards becomes ennobling, have we not also instincts which suggest a close alliance with the brutes? If the child amidst his newborn blisses suggests a heavenly origin, does he not also show sensual and cruel instincts which imply at least an admixture of baser elements? If man is responsive to all natural influences, how is he to distinguish between the good and the bad, and, in short, to frame a conscience out of the vague instincts which contain the germs of all the possible developments of the future?

To say that Wordsworth has not given a complete answer to such difficulties, is to say that he has not explained the origin of evil. It may be admitted, however, that he does to a certain extent show a narrowness of conception. The voice of nature, as he says, resembles an echo; but we 'unthinking creatures' listen to 'voices of two different natures.' We do not always distinguish between the echo of our lower passions and the 'echoes from beyond the grave.' Wordsworth sometimes fails to recognise the ambiguity of the oracle to which he appeals. The 'blessed

mood' in which we get rid of the burden of the world, is too easily confused with the mood in which we simply refuse to attend to it. He finds lonely meditation so inspiring that he is too indifferent to the troubles of less self-sufficing or clear-sighted human beings. The ambiguity makes itself felt in the sphere of morality. The ethical doctrine that virtue consists in conformity to nature becomes ambiguous with him, as with all its advocates, when we ask for a precise definition of nature. How are we to know which natural forces make for us and which fight against us?

The doctrine of the love of nature, generally regarded as Wordsworth's great lesson to mankind, means, as interpreted by himself and others, a love of the wilder and grander objects of natural scenery; a passion for the 'sounding cataract,' the rock, the mountain, and the forest; a preference, therefore, of the country to the town, and of the simpler to the more complex forms of social life. But what is the true value of this sentiment? The unfortunate Solitary in the 'Excursion' is beset by three Wordsworths; for the Wanderer and the Pastor are little more (as Wordsworth indeed intimates) than reflections of himself, seen in different mirrors. The Solitary represents the anti-social lessons to be derived from communion with nature. He has become a misanthrope, and has learnt from 'Candide' the lesson that we clearly do not live in the best of all possible worlds. Instead of learning the true lesson from nature by penetrating its deeper meanings, he manages to feed

> Pity and scorn and melancholy pride

by accidental and fanciful analogies, and sees in rock pyramids or obelisks a rude mockery of human toils. To confute this sentiment, to upset 'Candide,'

This dull product of a scoffer's pen,

is the purpose of the lofty poetry and versified prose of the long dialogues which ensue. That Wordsworth should call Voltaire dull is a curious example of the proverbial blindness of controversialists; but the moral may be equally good. It is given most pithily in the lines—

> We live by admiration, hope, and love;
> And even as these are well and wisely fused,
> The dignity of being we ascend.

'But what is Error?' continues the preacher; and the Solitary replies by saying, 'somewhat haughtily,' that love, admiration, and hope are 'mad fancy's favourite vassals.' The distinction between fancy and imagination is, in brief, that fancy deals with the superficial resemblances, and imagination with the deeper truths which underlie them. The purpose, then, of the 'Excursion,' and of Wordsworth's poetry in general, is to show how the higher faculty reveals a harmony which we overlook when, with the Solitary, we

Skim along the surfaces of things.

The rightly prepared mind can recognise the divine harmony which underlies all apparent disorder. The universe is to its perceptions like the shell whose murmur in a child's ear seems to express a mysterious union with the sea. But the mind must be rightly prepared Everything depends upon the point of view. One man, as he says in an elaborate figure, looking upon a series of ridges in spring from their northern side, sees a waste of snow, and from the south a continuous expanse of green. That view, we must take it, is the right one which is illuminated by the 'ray divine.' But we must train our eyes to recognise its splendour; and the final answer to the Solitary is there-

fore embodied in a series of narratives, showing by example how our spiritual vision may be purified or obscured. Our philosophy must be finally based, not upon abstract speculation and metaphysical arguments, but on the diffused consciousness of the healthy mind. As Butler sees the universe by the light of conscience, Wordsworth sees it through the wider emotions of awe, reverence, and love, produced in a sound nature.

The pantheistic conception, in short, leads to an unsatisfactory optimism in the general view of nature, and to an equal tolerance of all passions as equally 'natural.' To escape from this difficulty we must establish some more discriminative mode of interpreting nature. Man is the instrument played upon by all impulses, good or bad. The music which results may be harmonious or discordant. When the instrument is in tune, the music will be perfect; but when is it in tune, and how are we to know that it is in tune? That problem once solved we can tell which are the authentic utterances and which are the accidental discords. And by solving it, or by saying what is the right constitution of human beings, we shall discover which is the true philosophy of the universe, and what are the dictates of a sound moral sense. Wordsworth implicitly answers the question by explaining, in his favourite phrase, how we are to build up our moral being.

The voice of nature speaks at first in vague emotions, scarcely distinguishable from mere animal bouyancy. The boy, hooting in mimicry of the owls, receives in his heart the voice of mountain torrents and the solemn imagery of rocks, and woods, and stars. The sportive girl is unconsciously moulded into stateliness and grace by the floating clouds, the bending willow, and even by silent sympathy with the

motions of the storm. Nobody has ever shown, with such exquisite power as Wordsworth, how much of the charm of natural objects in later life is due to early associations, thus formed in a mind not yet capable of contemplating its own processes. As old Matthew says in the lines which, however familiar, can never be read without emotion—

> My eyes are dim with childish tears,
> My heart is idly stirred;
> For the same sound is in my ears
> Which in those days I heard.

And the strangely beautiful address to the cuckoo might be made into a text for a prolonged commentary by an æsthetic philosopher upon the power of early association. It curiously illustrates, for example, the reason of Wordsworth's delight in recalling sounds. The croak of the distant raven, the bleat of the mountain lamb, the splash of the leaping fish in the lonely tarn, are specially delightful to him, because the hearing is the most spiritual of our senses; and these sounds, like the cuckoo's cry, seem to convert the earth into an 'unsubstantial fairy place.' The phrase 'association' indeed implies a certain arbitrariness in the images suggested, which is not quite in accordance with Wordsworth's feeling. Though the echo depends partly upon the hearer, the mountain voices are specially adapted for certain moods. They have, we may say, a spontaneous affinity for the nobler affections. If some early passage in our childhood is associated with a particular spot, a house or a street will bring back the petty and accidental details: a mountain or a lake will revive the deeper and more permanent elements of feeling. If you have made love in a palace, according to Mr. Disraeli's prescription, the sight of it will recall the splendour of the

object's dress or jewellery ; if, as Wordsworth would prefer, with a background of mountains, it will appear in later days as if they had absorbed, and were always ready again to radiate forth, the tender and hallowing influences which then for the first time entered your life. The elementary and deepest passions are most easily associated with the sublime and beautiful in nature.

> The primal duties shine aloft like stars ;
> The charities that soothe, and heal, and bless,
> Are scattered at the feet of man like flowers.

And therefore if you have been happy enough to take delight in these natural and universal objects in the early days, when the most permanent associations are formed, the sight of them in later days will bring back by pre-ordained and divine symbolism whatever was most ennobling in your early feelings. The vulgarising associations will drop off of themselves, and what was pure and lofty will remain.

From this natural law follows another of Wordsworth's favourite precepts. The mountains are not with him a symbol of anti-social feelings. On the contrary, they are in their proper place as the background of the simple domestic affections. He loves his native hills, not in the Byronic fashion, as a savage wilderness, but as the appropriate framework in which a healthy social order can permanently maintain itself. That, for example, is, as he tells us, the thought which inspired the 'Brothers,' a poem which excels all modern idylls in weight of meaning and depth of feeling, by virtue of the idea thus embodied. The retired valley of Ennerdale, with its grand background of hills, precipitous enough to be fairly called mountains, forces the two lads into closer affection. Shut in by these 'enormous barriers,' and undistracted by the ebb and flow

of the outside world, the mutual love becomes concentrated. A tie like that of family blood is involuntarily imposed upon the little community of dalesmen. The image of sheep-tracks and shepherds clad in country grey is stamped upon the elder brother's mind, and comes back to him in tropical calms ; he hears the tones of his waterfalls in the piping shrouds ; and when he returns, recognises every fresh scar made by winter storms on the mountain sides, and knows by sight every unmarked grave in the little churchyard. The fraternal affection sanctifies the scenery, and the sight of the scenery brings back the affection with overpowering force upon his return. This is everywhere the sentiment inspired in Wordsworth by his beloved hills. It is not so much the love of nature pure and simple, as of nature seen through the deepest human feelings. The light glimmering in a lonely cottage, the one rude house in the deep valley, with its 'small lot of life-supporting fields and guardian rocks,' are necessary to point the moral and to draw to a definite focus the various forces of sentiment. The two veins of feeling are inseparably blended. The peasant noble, in the 'Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle,' learns equally from men and nature :—

> Love had he found in huts where poor men lie ;
> His daily teachers had been woods and hills,
> The silence that is in the starry skies,
> The sleep that is among the lonely hills.

Without the love, the silence and the sleep would have had no spiritual meaning. They are valuable as giving intensity and solemnity to the positive emotion.

The same remark is to be made upon Wordsworth's favourite teaching of the advantages of the contemplative life. He is fond of enforcing the doctrine of the familiar lines,

that we can feed our minds 'in a wise passiveness,' and that

> One impulse from the vernal wood
> Can teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good,
> Than all the sages can.

And, according to some commentators, this would seem to express the doctrine that the ultimate end of life is the cultivation of tender emotions without reference to action. The doctrine, thus absolutely stated, would be immoral and illogical. To recommend contemplation in preference to action is like preferring sleeping to waking; or saying, as a full expression of the truth, that silence is golden and speech silvern. Like that familiar phrase, Wordsworth's teaching is not to be interpreted literally. The essence of such maxims is to be one-sided. They are paradoxical in order to be emphatic. To have seasons of contemplation, of withdrawal from the world and from books, of calm surrendering of ourselves to the influences of nature, is a practice commended in one form or other by all moral teachers. It is a sanitary rule, resting upon obvious principles. The mind which is always occupied in a multiplicity of small observations, or the regulation of practical details, loses the power of seeing general principles and of associating all objects with the central emotions of 'admiration, hope, and love.' The philosophic mind is that which habitually sees the general in the particular, and finds food for the deepest thought in the simplest objects. It requires, therefore, periods of repose, in which the fragmentary and complex atoms of distracted feeling which make up the incessant whirl of daily life may have time to crystallise round the central thoughts. But it must feed in order to assimilate; and each process implies the other as its correlative. A

constant interest, therefore, in the joys and sorrows of our neighbours is as essential as quiet, self-centred rumination. It is when the eye 'has kept watch o'er man's mortality,' and by virtue of the tender sympathies of 'the human heart by which we live,' that to us

> The meanest flower which blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

The solitude which implies severance from natural sympathies and affections is poisonous. The happiness of the heart which lives alone,

> Housed in a dream, an outcast from the kind,
> . . . . . .
> Is to be pitied, for 'tis surely blind.

Wordsworth's meditations upon flowers or animal life are impressive because they have been touched by this constant sympathy. The sermon is always in his mind, and therefore every stone may serve for a text. His contemplation enables him to see the pathetic side of the small pains and pleasures which we are generally in too great a hurry to notice. There are times, of course, when this moralising tendency leads him to the regions of the namby pamby or sheer prosaic platitude. On the other hand, no one approaches him in the power of touching some rich chord of feeling by help of the pettiest incident. The old man going to the fox-hunt with a tear on his cheek, and saying to himself,

> The key I must take, for my Helen is dead ;

or the mother carrying home her dead sailor's bird ; the village schoolmaster, in whom a rift in the clouds revives the memory of his little daughter ; the old huntsman unable to cut through the stump of rotten wood—touch our hearts

at once and for ever. The secret is given in the rather prosaic apology for not relating a tale about poor Simon Lee :

> O reader ! had you in your mind
> Such stores as silent thought can bring,
> O gentle reader ! you would find
> A tale in everything.

The value of silent thought is so to cultivate the primitive emotions that they may flow spontaneously upon every common incident, and that every familiar object becomes symbolic of them. It is a familiar remark that a philosopher or man of science who has devoted himself to meditation upon some principle or law of nature, is always finding new illustrations in the most unexpected quarters. He cannot take up a novel or walk across the street without hitting upon appropriate instances. Wordsworth would apply the principle to the building up of our 'moral being.' Admiration, hope, and love should be so constantly in our thoughts, that innumerable sights and sounds which are meaningless to the world should become to us a language incessantly suggestive of the deepest topics of thought.

This explains his dislike to science, as he understood the word, and his denunciations of the 'world.' The man of science is one who cuts up nature into fragments, and not only neglects their possible significance for our higher feelings, but refrains on principle from taking it into account. The primrose suggests to him some new device in classification, and he would be worried by the suggestion of any spiritual significance as an annoying distraction. Viewing all objects 'in disconnection, dead and spiritless,' we are thus really waging

> An impious warfare with the very life
> Of our own souls.

We are putting the letter in place of the spirit, and dealing with nature as a mere grammarian deals with a poem. When we have learnt to associate every object with some lesson

> Of human suffering or of human joy;

when we have thus obtained the 'glorious habit,'

> By which sense is made
> Subservient still to moral purposes,
> Auxiliar to divine;

the 'dull eye' of science will light up; for, in observing natural processes, it will carry with it an incessant reference to the spiritual processes to which they are allied. Science, in short, requires to be brought into intimate connection with morality and religion. If we are forced for our immediate purpose to pursue truth for itself, regardless of consequences, we must remember all the more carefully that truth is a whole, and that fragmentary bits of knowledge become valuable as they are incorporated into a general system. The tendency of modern times to specialism brings with it a characteristic danger. It requires to be supplemented by a correlative process of integration. We must study details to increase our knowledge; we must accustom ourselves to look at the detail in the light of the general principles in order to make it fruitful.

The influence of that world which 'is too much with us late and soon' is of the same kind. The man of science loves barren facts for their own sake. The man of the world becomes devoted to some petty pursuit without reference to ultimate ends. He becomes a slave to money, or power, or praise, without caring for their effect upon his moral character. As social organisation becomes more

complete, the social unit becomes a mere fragment instead of being a complete whole in himself. Man becomes

> The senseless member of a vast machine,
> Serving as doth a spindle or a wheel.

The division of labour, celebrated with such enthusiasm by Adam Smith,[1] tends to crush all real life out of its victims. The soul of the political economist may rejoice when he sees a human being devoting his whole faculties to the performance of one subsidiary operation in the manufacture of a pin. The poet and the moralist must notice with anxiety the contrast between the old-fashioned peasant who, if he discharged each particular function clumsily, discharged at least many functions, and found exercise for all the intellectual and moral faculties of his nature, and the modern artisan doomed to the incessant repetition of one petty set of muscular expansions and contractions, and whose soul, if he has one, is therefore rather an incumbrance than otherwise. This is the evil which is constantly before Wordsworth's eyes, as it has certainly not become less prominent since his time. The danger of crushing the individual is a serious one according to his view; not because it implies the neglect of some abstract political rights, but from the impoverishment of character which is implied in the process. Give every man a vote, and abolish all interference with each man's private tastes, and the danger may still be as great as ever. The tendency to 'differentiation'—as we call it in modern phraseology—the social pulverisation, the lowering and narrowing of the individual's sphere of action and feeling to the pettiest details, depends upon processes underlying all political changes. It cannot, there-

[1] See Wordsworth's reference to the *Wealth of Nations*, in the *Prelude*, book xiii.

fore, be cured by any nostrum of constitution-mongers, or by the negative remedy of removing old barriers. It requires to be met by profounder moral and religious teaching. Men must be taught what is the really valuable part of their natures, and what is the purest happiness to be extracted from life, as well as allowed to gratify fully their own tastes ; for who can say that men encouraged by all their surroundings and appeals to the most obvious motives to turn themselves into machines, will not deliberately choose to be machines? Many powerful thinkers have illustrated Wordsworth's doctrine more elaborately, but nobody has gone more decisively to the root of the matter.

One other side of Wordsworth's teaching is still more significant and original. Our vague instincts are consolidated into reason by meditation, sympathy with our fellows, communion with nature, and a constant devotion to 'high endeavours.' If life run smoothly, the transformation may be easy, and our primitive optimism turn imperceptibly into general complacency. The trial comes when we make personal acquaintance with sorrow, and our early buoyancy begins to fail. We are tempted to become querulous or to lap ourselves in indifference. Most poets are content to bewail our lot melodiously, and admit that there is no remedy unless a remedy be found in 'the luxury of grief.' Prosaic people become selfish though not sentimental. They laugh at their old illusions, and turn to the solid consolations of comfort. Nothing is more melancholy than to study many biographies, and note—not the failure of early promise which may mean merely an aiming above the mark—but the progressive deterioration of character which so often follows grief and disappointment. If it be not true that most men grow worse as they grow old, it is

surely true that few men pass through the world without being corrupted as much as purified.

Now Wordsworth's favourite lesson is the possibility of turning grief and disappointment into account. He teaches in many forms the necessity of 'transmuting' sorrow into strength. One of the great evils is a lack of power,

> An agonising sorrow to transmute.

The Happy Warrior is, above all, the man who in face of all human miseries can

> Exercise a power
> Which is our human nature's highest dower ;
> Controls them, and subdues, transmutes, bereaves
> Of their bad influence, and their good receives ;

who is made more compassionate by familiarity with sorrow, more placable by contest, purer by temptation, and more enduring by distress.[1] It is owing to the constant presence of this thought, to his sensibility to the refining influence of sorrow, that Wordsworth is the only poet who will bear reading in times of distress. Other poets mock us by an impossible optimism, or merely reflect the feelings which, however we may play with them in times of cheerfulness, have now become an intolerable burden. Wordsworth suggests the single topic which, so far at least as this world is concerned, can really be called consolatory. None of the ordinary commonplaces will serve, or serve at most

[1] So, too, in the *Prelude* :—

> Then was the truth received into my heart,
> That, under heaviest sorrow earth can bring,
> If from the affliction somewhere do not grow
> Honour which could not else have been, a faith,
> An elevation, and a sanctity ;
> If new strength be not given, nor old restored,
> The fault is ours, not Nature's.

as indications of human sympathy. But there is some consolation in the thought that even death may bind the survivors closer, and leave as a legacy enduring motives to noble action. It is easy to say this ; but Wordsworth has the merit of feeling the truth in all its force, and expressing it by the most forcible images. In one shape or another the sentiment is embodied in most of his really powerful poetry. It is intended, for example, to be the moral of the 'White Doe of Rylstone.' There, as Wordsworth says, everything fails so far as its object is external and unsubstantial ; everything succeeds so far as it is moral and spiritual. Success grows out of failure ; and the mode in which it grows is indicated by the lines which give the keynote of the poem. Emily, the heroine, is to become a soul

> By force of sorrows high
> Uplifted to the purest sky
> Of undisturbed serenity.

The 'White Doe' is one of those poems which make many readers inclined to feel a certain tenderness for Jeffrey's dogged insensibility ; and I confess that I am not one of its warm admirers. The sentiment seems to be unduly relaxed throughout ; there is a want of sympathy with heroism of the rough and active type, which is, after all, at least as worthy of admiration as the more passive variety of the virtue ; and the defect is made more palpable by the position of the chief actors. These rough borderers, who recall William of Deloraine and Dandie Dinmont, are somehow out of their element when preaching the doctrines of quietism and submission to circumstances. But, whatever our judgment of this particular embodiment of Wordsworth's moral philosophy, the inculcation of the same

lesson gives force to many of his finest poems. It is enough to mention the 'Leech-gatherer,' the 'Stanzas on Peele Castle,' 'Michael,' and, as expressing the inverse view of the futility of idle grief, 'Laodamia,' where he has succeeded in combining his morality with more than his ordinary beauty of poetical form. The teaching of all these poems falls in with the doctrine already set forth. All moral teaching, I have sometimes fancied, might be summed up in the one formula, 'Waste not.' Every element of which our nature is composed may be said to be good in its proper place; and therefore every vicious habit springs out of the misapplication of forces which might be turned to account by judicious training. The waste of sorrow is one of the most lamentable forms of waste. Sorrow too often tends to produce bitterness or effeminacy of character. But it may, if rightly used, serve only to detach us from the lower motives and give sanctity to the higher. That is what Wordsworth sees with unequalled clearness, and he therefore sees also the condition of profiting. The mind in which the most valuable elements have been systematically strengthened by meditation, by association of deep thought with the most universal presences, by constant sympathy with the joys and sorrows of its fellows, will be prepared to convert sorrow into a medicine instead of a poison. Sorrow is deteriorating so far as it is selfish. The man who is occupied with his own interests makes grief an excuse for effeminate indulgence in self-pity. He becomes weaker and more fretful. The man who has learnt habitually to think of himself as part of a greater whole, whose conduct has been habitually directed to noble ends, is purified and strengthened by the spiritual convulsion. His disappointment, or his loss of some beloved object, makes him more anxious to fix the

bases of his happiness widely and deeply, and to be content with the consciousness of honest work, instead of looking for what is called success.

But I must not take to preaching in the place of Wordsworth. The whole theory is most nobly summed up in the grand lines already noticed on the character of the Happy Warrior. There Wordsworth has explained in the most forcible and direct language the mode in which a grand character can be formed; how youthful impulses may change into manly purpose; how pain and sorrow may be transmuted into new forces; how the mind may be fixed upon lofty purposes; how the domestic affections—which give the truest happiness—may also be the greatest source of strength to the man who is

> More brave for this, that he has much to lose;

and how, finally, he becomes indifferent to all petty ambition—

> Finds comfort in himself and in his cause;
> And, while the mortal mist is gathering, draws
> His breath in confidence of Heaven's applause.
> This is the Happy Warrior, this is he
> Whom every man in arms should wish to be.

We may now see what ethical theory underlies Wordsworth's teaching of the transformation of instinct into reason. We must start from the postulate that there is in fact a Divine order in the universe; and that conformity to this order produces beauty as embodied in the external world, and is the condition of virtue as regulating our character. It is by obedience to the 'stern lawgiver,' Duty, that flowers gain their fragrance, and that 'the most ancient heavens' preserve their freshness and strength. But this postulate does not seek for justification in abstract metaphysical reasoning. The 'Intimations of Immortality' are

precisely intimations, not intellectual intuitions. They are vague and emotional, not distinct and logical. They are a feeling of harmony, not a perception of innate ideas. And, on the other hand, our instincts are not a mere chaotic mass of passions, to be gratified without considering their place and function in a certain definite scheme. They have been implanted by the Divine hand, and the harmony which we feel corresponds to a real order. To justify them we must appeal to experience, but to experience interrogated by a certain definite procedure. Acting upon the assumption that the Divine order exists, we shall come to recognise it, though we could not deduce it by an *à priori* method.

The instrument, in fact, finds itself originally tuned by its Maker, and may preserve its original condition by careful obedience to the stern teaching of life. The buoyancy common to all youthful and healthy natures then changes into a deeper and more solemn mood. The great primary emotions retain the original impulse, but increase their volume. Grief and disappointment are transmuted into tenderness, sympathy, and endurance. The reason, as it develops, regulates, without weakening, the primitive instincts. All the greatest, and therefore most common, sights of nature are indelibly associated with 'admiration, hope, and love;' and all increase of knowledge and power is regarded as a means for furthering the gratification of our nobler emotions. Under the opposite treatment, the character loses its freshness, and we regard the early happiness as an illusion. The old emotions dry up at their source. Grief produces fretfulness, misanthropy, or effeminacy. Power is wasted on petty ends and frivolous excitement, and knowledge becomes barren and pedantic. In this way the postulate justifies itself by producing

the noblest type of character. When the 'moral being' is thus built up, its instincts become its convictions, we recognise the true voice of nature, and distinguish it from the echo of our passions. Thus we come to know how the Divine order and the laws by which the character is harmonised are the laws of morality.

To possible objections it might be answered by Wordsworth that this mode of assuming in order to prove is the normal method of philosophy. 'You must love him,' as he says of the poet,

> Ere to you
> He will seem worthy of your love.

The doctrine corresponds to the *crede ut intelligas* of the divine; or to the philosophic theory that we must start from the knowledge already constructed within us by instincts which have not yet learnt to reason. And, finally, if a persistent reasoner should ask why—even admitting the facts—the higher type should be preferred to the lower, Wordsworth may ask, Why is bodily health preferable to disease? If a man likes weak lungs and a bad digestion, reason cannot convince him of his error. The physician has done enough when he has pointed out the sanitary laws obedience to which generates strength, long life, and power of enjoyment. The moralist is in the same position when he has shown how certain habits conduce to the development of a type superior to its rivals in all the faculties which imply permanent peace of mind and power of resisting the shocks of the world without disintegration. Much undoubtedly remains to be said. Wordsworth's teaching, profound and admirable as it may be, has not the potency to silence the scepticism which has gathered strength since his day, and assailed fundamental—or what to him seemed

fundamental—tenets of his system. No one can yet say what transformation may pass upon the thoughts and emotions for which he found utterance in speaking of the Divinity and sanctity of nature. Some people vehemently maintain that the words will be emptied of all meaning if the old theological conceptions to which he was so firmly attached should disappear with the development of new modes of thought. Nature, as regarded by the light of modern science, will be the name of a cruel and wasteful, or at least of a purely neutral and indifferent power, or perhaps as merely an equivalent for the Unknowable, to which the conditions of our intellect prevent us from ever attaching any intelligible predicate. Others would say that in whatever terms we choose to speak of the mysterious darkness which surrounds our little island of comparative light, the emotion generated in a thoughtful mind by the contemplation of the universe will remain unaltered or strengthen with clearer knowledge ; and that we shall express ourselves in a new dialect without altering the essence of our thought. The emotions to which Wordsworth has given utterance will remain, though the system in which he believed should sink into oblivion ; as, indeed, all human systems have found different modes of symbolising the same fundamental feelings. But it is enough vaguely to indicate considerations not here to be developed.

It only remains to be added once more that Wordsworth's poetry derives its power from the same source as his philosophy. It speaks to our strongest feelings because his speculation rests upon our deepest thoughts. His singular capacity for investing all objects with a glow derived from early associations ; his keen sympathy with natural and simple emotions ; his sense of the sanctifying influences

which can be extracted from sorrow, are of equal value to his power over our intellects and our imaginations. His psychology, stated systematically, is rational; and, when expressed passionately, turns into poetry. To be sensitive to the most important phenomena is the first step equally towards a poetical or a scientific exposition. To see these truly is the condition of making the poetry harmonious and the philosophy logical. And it is often difficult to say which power is most remarkable in Wordsworth. It would be easy to illustrate the truth by other than moral topics. His sonnet, noticed by De Quincey, in which he speaks of the abstracting power of darkness, and observes that as the hills pass into twilight we see the same sight as the ancient Britons, is impressive as it stands, but would be equally good as an illustration in a metaphysical treatise. Again, the sonnet beginning

> With ships the sea was sprinkled far and wide,

is at once, as he has shown in a commentary of his own, an illustration of a curious psychological law—of our tendency, that is, to introduce an arbitrary principle of order into a random collection of objects—and, for the same reason, a striking embodiment of the corresponding mood of feeling. The little poem called 'Stepping Westward' is in the same way at once a delicate expression of a specific sentiment and an acute critical analysis of the subtle associations suggested by a single phrase. But such illustrations might be multiplied indefinitely. As he has himself said, there is scarcely one of his poems which does not call attention to some moral sentiment, or to a general principle or law of thought, of our intellectual constitution.

Finally, we might look at the reverse side of the picture,

and endeavour to show how the narrow limits of Wordsworth's power are connected with certain moral defects; with the want of quick sympathy which shows itself in his dramatic feebleness, and the austerity of character which caused him to lose his special gifts too early and become a rather commonplace defender of conservatism; and that curious diffidence (he assures us that it was 'diffidence') which induced him to write many thousand lines of blank verse entirely about himself. But the task would be superfluous as well as ungrateful. It was his aim, he tells us, 'to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous;' and, high as was the aim, he did much towards its accomplishment.

LANDOR'S IMAGINARY CONVERSATIONS

When Mr. Forster brought out the collected edition of Landor's works, the critics were generally embarrassed. They evaded for the most part any committal of themselves to an estimate of their author's merits, and were generally content to say that we might now look forward to a definitive judgment in the ultimate court of literary appeal. Such an attitude of suspense was natural enough. Landor is perhaps the most striking instance in modern literature of a radical divergence of opinion between the connoisseurs and the mass of readers. The general public have never been induced to read him, in spite of the lavish applauses of some self-constituted authorities. One may go further. It is doubtful whether those who aspire to a finer literary palate than is possessed by the vulgar herd are really so keenly appreciative as the innocent reader of published remarks might suppose. Hypocrisy in matters of taste—whether of the literal or metaphorical kind—is the commonest of vices. There are vintages, both material and intellectual, which are more frequently praised than heartily enjoyed. I have heard very good judges whisper in private that they have found Landor dull; and the rare citations made from his works often betray a very perfunctory study of them. Not long ago, for example, an able critic quoted a passage from one of the 'Imaginary Conversations' to

prove that Landor admired Milton's prose, adding the remark that it might probably be taken as an expression of his real sentiments, although put in the mouth of a dramatic person. To anyone who has read Landor with ordinary attention, it seems as absurd to speak in this hypothetical manner as it would be to infer from some incidental allusion that Mr. Ruskin admires Turner. Landor's adoration for Milton is one of the most conspicuous of his critical propensities. There are, of course, many eulogies upon Landor of undeniable weight. They are hearty, genuine, and from competent judges. Yet the enthusiasm of such admirable critics as Mr. Emerson and Mr. Lowell may be carped at by some who fancy that every American enjoys a peculiar sense of complacency when rescuing an English genius from the neglect of his own countrymen. If Mr. Browning and Mr. Swinburne have been conspicuous in their admiration, it might be urged that neither of them has too strong a desire to keep to that beaten highroad of the commonplace, beyond which even the best guides meet with pitfalls. Southey's praises of Landor were sincere and emphatic; but it must be added that they provoke a recollection of one of Johnson's shrewd remarks. 'The reciprocal civility of authors,' says the Doctor, 'is one of the most risible scenes in the farce of life.' One forgives poor Southey indeed for the vanity which enabled him to bear up so bravely against anxiety and repeated disappointment; and if both he and Landor found that 'reciprocal civility' helped them to bear the disregard of contemporaries, one would not judge them harshly. It was simply a tacit agreement to throw their harmless vanity into a common stock. Of Mr. Forster, Landor's faithful friend and admirer, one can only say that in his writing about Landor, as

upon other topics, we are distracted between the respect due to his strong feeling for the excellent in literature, and the undeniable facts that his criticisms have a very blunt edge, and that his eulogies are apt to be indiscriminate.

Southey and Wordsworth had a simple method of explaining the neglect of a great author. According to them, contemporary neglect affords a negative presumption in favour of permanent reputation. No lofty poet has honour in his own generation. Southey's conviction that his ponderous epics would make the fortune of his children is a pleasant instance of self-delusion. But the theory is generally admitted in regard to Wordsworth ; and Landor accepted and defended it with characteristic vigour. 'I have published,' he says in the conversation with Hare, 'five volumes of "Imaginary Conversations :" cut the worst of them through the middle, and there will remain in the decimal fraction enough to satisfy my appetite for fame. I shall dine late ; but the dining-room will be well lighted, the guests few and select.' He recurs frequently to the doctrine. 'Be patient !' he says, in another character. 'From the higher heavens of poetry it is long before the radiance of the brightest star can reach the world below. We hear that one man finds out one beauty, another man finds out another, placing his observatory and instruments on the poet's grave. The worms must have eaten us before we rightly know what we are. It is only when we are skeletons that we are boxed and ticketed and prized and shown. Be it so ! I shall not be tired of waiting.' Conscious, as he says in his own person, that in 2,000 years there have not been five volumes of prose (the work of one author) equal to his 'Conversations,' he could indeed

afford to wait: if conscious of earthly things, he must be waiting still.

This superlative self-esteem strikes one, to say the truth, as part of Landor's abiding boyishness. It is only in schoolboy themes that we are still inclined to talk about the devouring love of fame. Grown-up men look rightly with some contempt upon such aspirations. What work a man does is really done in, or at least through, his own generation; and the posthumous fame which poets affect to value means, for the most part, being known by name to a few antiquarians, schoolmasters, or secluded students. When the poet, to adopt Landor's metaphor, has become a luminous star, his superiority to those which have grown dim by distance is indeed for the first time clearly demonstrated. We can still see him, though other bodies of his system have vanished into the infinite depths of oblivion. But he has also ceased to give appreciable warmth or light to ordinary human beings. He is a splendid name, but not a living influence. There are, of course, exceptions and qualifications to any such statements, but I have a suspicion that even Shakespeare's chief work may have been done in the Globe Theatre, to living audiences, who felt what they never thought of criticising, and were quite unable to measure; and that, spite of all æsthetic philosophers and minute antiquarians and judicious revivals, his real influence upon men's minds has been for the most part declining as his fame has been spreading. To defend or fully expound this heretical dogma would take too much space. The 'late-dinner' theory, however, as held by Wordsworth and Landor, is subject to one less questionable qualification. It is an utterly untenable proposition that great men have been generally overlooked in their own day.

If we run over the chief names of our literature, it would be hard to point to one which was not honoured, and sometimes honoured to excess, during its proprietor's lifetime. It is, indeed, true that much ephemeral underwood has often hidden in part the majestic forms which now stand out as sole relics of the forest. It is true also that the petty spite and jealousy of contemporaries, especially of their ablest contemporaries, has often prevented the full recognition of great men. And there have been some whose fame, like that of Bunyan and De Foe, has extended amongst the lower sphere of readers before receiving the ratification of constituted judges. But such irregularities in the distribution of fame do not quite meet the point. I doubt whether one could mention a single case in which an author, overlooked at the time both by the critics and the mass, has afterwards become famous; and the cases are very rare in which a reputation once decayed has again taken root and shown real vitality. The experiment of resuscitation has been tried of late years with great pertinacity. The forgotten images of our seventeenth-century ancestors have been brought out of the lumber-room amidst immense flourishes of trumpets, but they are terribly worm-eaten; and all efforts to make their statues once more stand firmly on their pedestals have generally failed. Landor himself refused to see the merits of the mere 'mushrooms,' as he somewhere called them, which grew beneath the Shakespearian oak; and though such men as Chapman, Webster, and Ford have received the warmest eulogies of Lamb and other able successors, their vitality is spasmodic and uncertain. We generally read them, if we read them, at the point of the critic's bayonet.

The case of Wordsworth is no precedent for Landor.

Wordsworth's fame was for a long time confined to a narrow sect, and he did all in his power to hinder its spread by wilful disregard of the established canons—even when founded in reason. A reformer who will not court the prejudices even of his friends is likely to be slow in making converts. But it is one thing to be slow in getting a hearing, and another in attracting men who are quite prepared to hear. Wordsworth resembled a man coming into a drawing-room with muddy boots and a smock-frock. He courted disgust, and such courtship is pretty sure of success. But Landor made his bow in full court dress. In spite of the difficulty of his poetry, he had all the natural graces which are apt to propitiate cultivated readers. His prose has merits so conspicuous and so dear to the critical mind, that one might have expected his welcome from the connoisseurs to be warm even beyond the limit of sincerity. To praise him was to announce one's own possession of a fine classical taste, and there can be no greater stimulus to critical enthusiasm. One might have guessed that he would be a favourite with all who set up for a discernment superior to that of the vulgar; though the causes which must obstruct a wide recognition of his merits are sufficiently obvious. It may be interesting to consider the cause of his ill-success with some fulness; and it is a comfort to the critic to reflect that in such a case even obtuseness is in some sort a qualification; for it will enable one to sympathise with the vulgar insensibility to the offered delicacy, if only to substitute articulate rejection for simple stolid silence.

I do not wish, indeed, to put forward such a claim too unreservedly. I will merely take courage to confess that Landor very frequently bores me. So do a good many

writers whom I thoroughly admire. If any courage be wanted for such a confession, it is certainly not when writing upon Landor that one should be reticent for want of example. Nobody ever spoke his mind more freely about great reputations. He is, for example, almost the only poet who ever admitted that he could not read Spenser continuously. Even Milton in Landor's hands, in defiance of his known opinions, is made to speak contemptuously of 'The Faery Queen.' 'There is scarcely a poet of the same eminence,' says Porson, obviously representing Landor in this case, 'whom I have found it so delightful to read in, and so hard to read through.' What Landor here says of Spenser, I should venture to say of Landor. There are few books of the kind into which one may dip with so great a certainty of finding much to admire as the 'Imaginary Conversations,' and few of any high reputation which are so certain to become wearisome after a time. And yet, upon thinking of the whole five volumes so emphatically extolled by their author, one feels the necessity of some apology for this admission of inadequate sympathy. There is a vigour of feeling, an originality of character, a fineness of style which makes one understand, if not quite agree to, the audacious self-commendation. Part of the effect is due simply to the sheer quantity of good writing. Take any essay separately, and one must admit that—to speak only of his contemporaries—there is a greater charm in passages of equal length by Lamb, De Quincey, or even Hazlitt. None of them gets upon such stilts, or seems so anxious to keep the reader at arm's length. But, on the other hand, there is something imposing in so continuous a flow of stately and generally faultless English, with so many weighty aphorisms rising spontaneously, without splashing or disturbance, to

the surface of talk, and such an easy felicity of theme unmarred by the flash and glitter of the modern epigrammatic style. Lamb is both sweeter and more profound, to say nothing of his incomparable humour ; but then Lamb's flight is short and uncertain. De Quincey's passages of splendid rhetoric are too often succeeded by dead levels of verbosity and laboured puerilities which make annoyance alternate with enthusiasm. Hazlitt is often spasmodic, and his intrusive egotism is pettish and undignified. But so far at least as his style is concerned, Landor's unruffled abundant stream of continuous harmony excites one's admiration the more the longer one reads. Hardly anyone who has written so much has kept so uniformly to a high level, and so seldom descended to empty verbosity or to downright slipshod. It is true that the substance does not always correspond to the perfection of the form. There are frequent discontinuities of thought where the style is smoothest. He reminds one at times of those Alpine glaciers where an exquisitely rounded surface of snow conceals yawning crevasses beneath ; and if one stops for a moment to think, one is apt to break through the crust with an abrupt and annoying jerk.

The excellence of Landor's style has, of course, been universally acknowledged, and it is natural that it should be more appreciated by his fellow-craftsmen than by general readers less interested in technical questions. The defects are the natural complements of its merits. When accused of being too figurative, he had a ready reply. 'Wordsworth,' he says in one of his 'Conversations,' 'slithers on the soft mud, and cannot stop himself until he comes down. In his poetry there is as much of prose as there is of poetry in the prose of Milton. But prose on certain occasions can

bear a great deal of poetry ; on the other hand, poetry sinks and swoons under a moderate weight of prose, and neither fan nor burnt feather can bring her to herself again.' The remark about the relations of prose and poetry was originally made in a real conversation with Wordsworth in defence of Landor's own luxuriance. Wordsworth, it is said, took it to himself, and not without reason, as appears by its insertion in this 'Conversation.' The retort, however happy, is no more conclusive than other cases of the *tu quoque*. We are too often inclined to say to Landor as Southey says to Porson in another place : 'Pray leave these tropes and metaphors.' His sense suffers from a superfetation of figures, or from the undue pursuit of a figure, till the 'wind of the poor phrase is cracked.' In the phrase just quoted, for example, we could dispense with the 'fan and burnt feather,' which have very little relation to the thought. So, to take an instance of the excessively florid, I may quote the phrase in which Marvell defends his want of respect for the aristocracy of his day. 'Ever too hard upon great men, Mr. Marvell !' says Bishop Parker ; and Marvell replies :—

> Little men in lofty places, who throw long shadows because our sun is setting ; the men so little and the places so lofty that, casting my pebble, I only show where they stand. They would be less contented with themselves, if they had obtained their preferment honestly. Luck and dexterity always give more pleasure than intellect and knowledge ; because they fill up what they fall on to the brim at once ; and people run to them with acclamations at the splash. Wisdom is reserved and noiseless, contented with hard earnings, and daily letting go some early acquisition to make room for better specimens. But great is the exultation of a worthless man when he receives for the chips and raspings of his Bridewell logwood a richer reward than the best and wisest for extensive tracts of well-cleared truths ! Even he who has sold his country——

'Forbear, good Mr. Marvell,' says Bishop Parker; and one is inclined to sympathise with the poor man drowned under this cascade of tropes. It is certainly imposing, but I should be glad to know the meaning of the metaphor about 'luck and dexterity.' Passages occur, again, in which we are tempted to think that Landor is falling into an imitation of an obsolete model. Take, for example, the following:—

> A narrow mind cannot be enlarged, nor can a capacious one be contracted. Are we angry with a phial for not being a flask; or do we wonder that the skin of an elephant sits uneasily on a squirrel?

Or this, in reference to Wordsworth:—

> Pastiness and flatness are the qualities of a pancake, and thus far he attained his aim: but if he means it for me, let him place the accessories on the table, lest what is insipid and clammy . . . grow into duller accretion and moister viscidity the more I masticate it.

Or a remark given to Newton:—

> Wherever there is vacuity of mind, there must either be flaccidity or craving; and this vacuity must necessarily be found in the greater part of princes, from the defects of their education, from the fear of offending them in its progress by interrogations and admonitions, from the habit of rendering all things valueless by the facility with which they are obtained, and transitory by the negligence with which they are received and holden.

Should we not remove the names of Porson and Newton from these sentences and substitute Sam Johnson? The last passage reads very like a quotation from the 'Rambler.' Johnson was, in my opinion and in Landor's, a great writer in spite of his mannerism; but the mannerism is always rather awkward, and in such places we seem to see—

certainly not a squirrel—but, say, a thoroughbred horse invested with the skin of an elephant.

These lapses into the inflated are, of course, exceptional with Landor. There can be no question of the fineness of his perception in all matters of literary form. To say that his standard of style is classical is to repeat a commonplace too obvious for repetition, except to add a doubt whether he is not often too ostentatious and self-conscious in his classicism. He loves and often exhibits a masculine simplicity, and speaks with enthusiasm of Locke and Swift in their own departments. Locke is to be 'revered;' he is 'too simply grand for admiration;' and no one, he thinks, ever had such a power as Swift of saying forcibly and completely whatever he meant to say. But for his own purposes he generally prefers a different model. The qualities which he specially claims seem to be summed up in the conversation upon Bacon's Essays between Newton and Barrow. Cicero and Bacon, says Barrow, have more wisdom between them than all the philosophers of antiquity. Newton's review of the Essays, he adds, 'hath brought back to my recollection so much of shrewd judgment, so much of rich imagery, such a profusion of truths so plain as (without his manner of exhibiting them) to appear almost unimportant, that in various high qualities of the human mind I must acknowledge not only Cicero, but every prose writer among the Greeks, to stand far below him. Cicero is least valued for his highest merits, his fulness, and his perspicuity. Bad judges (and how few are not so!) desire in composition the concise and obscure; not knowing that the one most frequently arises from paucity of materials, and the other from inability to manage and dispose them.' Landor aims, like Bacon, at rich imagery, at giving to thoughts which appear

plain more value by fineness of expression, and at compressing shrewd judgments into weighty aphorisms. He would equally rival Cicero in fulness and perspicuity; whilst a severe rejection of everything slovenly or superfluous would save him from ever deviating into the merely florid. So far as style can be really separated from thought, we may admit unreservedly that he has succeeded in his aim, and has attained a rare harmony of tone and colouring.

There may, indeed, be some doubt as to his perspicuity. Southey said that Landor was obscure, whilst adding that he could not explain the cause of the obscurity. Causes enough may be suggested. Besides his incoherency, his love of figures which sometimes become half detached from the underlying thought, and an over-anxiety to avoid mere smartness which sometimes leads to real vagueness, he expects too much from his readers, or perhaps despises them too much. He will not condescend to explanation if you do not catch his drift at half a word. He is so desirous to round off his transitions gracefully, that he obliterates the necessary indications of the main divisions of the subject. When criticising Milton or Dante, he can hardly keep his hand off the finest passages in his desire to pare away superfluities. Treating himself in the same fashion, he leaves none of those little signs which, like the typographical hand prefixed to a notice, are extremely convenient, though strictly superfluous. It is doubtless unpleasant to have the hard framework of logical divisions showing too distinctly in an argument, or to have a too elaborate statement of dates and places and external relations in a romance. But such aids to the memory may be removed too freely. The building may be injured in taking away the scaffolding.

Faults of this kind, however, will not explain Landor's failure to get a real hold upon a large body of readers. Writers of far greater obscurity and much more repellant blemishes of style to set against much lower merits, have gained a far wider popularity. The want of sympathy between so eminent a literary artist and his time must rest upon some deeper divergence of sentiment. Landor's writings present the same kind of problem as his life. We are told, and we can see for ourselves, that he was a man of many very high and many very amiable qualities. He was full of chivalrous feeling ; capable of the most flowing and delicate courtesy ; easily stirred to righteous indignation against every kind of tyranny and bigotry ; capable, too, of a tenderness pleasantly contrasted with his outbursts of passing wrath ; passionately fond of children, and a true lover of dogs. But with all this, he could never live long at peace with anybody. He was the most impracticable of men, and every turning-point in his career was decided by some vehement quarrel. He had to leave school in consequence of a quarrel, trifling in itself, but aggravated by 'a fierce defiance of all authority and a refusal to ask forgiveness.' He got into a preposterous scrape at Oxford, and forced the authorities to rusticate him. This branched out into a quarrel with his father. When he set up as a country gentleman at Llanthony Abbey, he managed to quarrel with his neighbours and his tenants, until the accumulating consequences to his purse forced him to go to Italy. On the road thither he began the first of many quarrels with his wife, which ultimately developed into a chronic quarrel and drove him back to England. From England he was finally dislodged by another quarrel which drove him back to Italy. Intermediate quarrels of minor importance are

intercalated between those which provoked decisive crises. The lightheartedness which provoked all these difficulties is not more remarkable than the ease with which he threw them off his mind. Blown hither and thither by his own gusts of passion, he always seems to fall on his feet, and forgets his trouble as a schoolboy forgets yesterday's flogging. On the first transitory separation from his wife, he made himself quite happy by writing Latin verses; and he always seems to have found sufficient consolation in such literary occupation for vexations which would have driven some people out of their mind. He would not, he writes, encounter the rudeness of a certain lawyer to save all his property; but he adds, 'I have chastised him in my Latin poetry now in the press.' Such a mode of chastisement seems to have been as completely satisfactory to Landor as it doubtless was to the lawyer.

His quarrels do not alienate us, for it is evident that they did not proceed from any malignant passion. If his temper was ungovernable, his passions were not odious, or, in any low sense, selfish. In many, if not all, of his quarrels he seems to have had at least a very strong show of right on his side, and to have put himself in the wrong by an excessive insistence upon his own dignity. He was one of those ingenious people who always contrive to be punctilious in the wrong place. It is amusing to observe how Scott generally bestows upon his heroes so keen a sense of honour that he can hardly save them from running their heads against stone walls; whilst to their followers he gives an abundance of shrewd sense which fully appreciates Falstaff's theory of honour. Scott himself managed to combine the two qualities; but poor Landor seems to have

had Hotspur's readiness to quarrel on the tenth part of a hair without the redeeming touch of common-sense. In a slightly different social sphere, he must, one would fancy, have been the mark of a dozen bullets before he had grown up to manhood ; it is not quite clear how, even as it was, he avoided duels, unless because he regarded the practice as a Christian barbarism to which the ancients had never condescended.

His position and surroundings tended to aggravate his incoherencies of statement. Like his own Peterborough, he was a man of aristocratic feeling, with a hearty contempt for aristocrats. The expectation that he would one day join the ranks of the country gentlemen unsettled him as a scholar ; and when he became a landed proprietor he despised his fellow 'barbarians' with a true scholar's contempt. He was not forced into the ordinary professional groove, and yet did not fully imbibe the prejudices of the class who can afford to be idle, and the natural result is an odd mixture of conflicting prejudices. He is classical in taste and cosmopolitan in life, and yet he always retains a certain John-Bull element. His preference of Shakespeare to Racine is associated with, if not partly prompted by, a mere English antipathy to foreigners. He never becomes Italianised so far as to lose his contempt for men whose ideas of sport rank larks with the orthodox partridge. He abuses Castlereagh and poor George III. to his heart's content, and so far flies in the face of British prejudice ; but it is by no means as a sympathiser with foreign innovations. His republicanism is strongly dashed with old-fashioned conservatism, and he is proud of a doubtful descent from old worthies of the true English type. Through all his would-be paganism we feel that at bottom he is after all a

true-born and wrong-headed Englishman. He never, like Shelley, pushed his quarrel with the old order to the extreme, but remained in a solitary cave of Adullam. 'There can be no great genius,' says Penn to Peterborough, 'where there is not profound and continued reasoning.' The remark is too good for Penn ; and yet it would be dangerous in Landor's own mouth ; for certainly the defect which most strikes us, both in his life and his writings, is just the inconsistency which leaves most people as the reasoning powers develop. His work was marred by the unreasonableness of a nature so impetuous and so absorbed by any momentary gust of passion that he could never bring his thoughts or his plans to a focus, or conform them to a general scheme. His prejudices master him both in speculation and practice. He cannot fairly rise above them, or govern them by reference to general principles or the permanent interests of his life. In the vulgar phrase, he is always ready to cut off his nose to spite his face. He quarrels with his schoolmaster or his wife. In an instant he is all fire and fury, runs amuck at his best friends, and does irreparable mischief. Some men might try to atone for such offences by remorse. Landor, unluckily for himself, could forget the past as easily as he could ignore the future. He lives only in the present, and can throw himself into a favourite author or compose Latin verses or an imaginary conversation as though schoolmasters or wives, or duns or critics, had no existence. With such a temperament, reasoning, which implies patient contemplation and painful liberation from prejudice, has no fair chance ; his principles are not the growth of thought, but the translation into dogmas of intense likes and dislikes, which have grown up in his mind he scarcely knows how, and gathered strength

by sheer force of repetition instead of deliberate examination.

His writings reflect—and in some ways only too faithfully—these idiosyncrasies. Southey said that his temper was the only explanation of his faults. 'Never did man represent himself in his writings so much less generous, less just, less compassionate, less noble in all respects than he really is. I certainly,' he adds, 'never knew anyone of brighter genius or of kinder heart.' Southey, no doubt, was in this case resenting certain attacks of Landor's upon his most cherished opinions ; and, truly, nothing but continuous separation could have preserved the friendship between two men so peremptorily opposed upon so many essential points. Southey's criticism, though sharpened by such latent antagonisms, has really much force. The 'Conversations' give much that Landor's friends would have been glad to ignore ; and yet they present such a full-length portrait of the man, that it is better to dwell upon them than upon his poetry, which, moreover, with all its fine qualities, is (I cannot help thinking) of less intrinsic value. The ordinary reader, however, is repelled from the 'Conversations' not only by mere inherent difficulties, but by comments which raise a false expectation. An easy-going critic is apt to assume of any book that it exactly fulfils the ostensible aim of the author. So we are told of 'Shakespeare's Examination' (and on the high authority of Charles Lamb), that no one could have written it except Landor or Shakespeare himself. When Bacon is introduced, we are assured that the aphorisms introduced are worthy of Bacon himself. What Cicero is made to say is exactly what he would have said, 'if he could ;' and the dialogue between Walton, Cotton, and Oldways is, of course, as good as a

passage from the 'Complete Angler.' In the same spirit we are told that the dialogues were to be 'one-act dramas;' and we are informed how the great philosophers, statesmen, poets, and artists of all ages did in fact pass across the stage, each represented to the life, and each discoursing in his most admirable style.

All this is easy to say, but unluckily represents what the 'Conversations' would have been had they been perfect. To say that they are very far from perfect is only to say that they were the compositions of a man; but Landor was also a man to whom his best friends would hardly attribute a remarkable immunity from fault. The dialogue, it need hardly be remarked, is one of the most difficult of all forms of composition. One rule, however, would be generally admitted. Landor defends his digressions on the ground that they always occur in real conversations. If we 'adhere to one point,' he says (in Southey's person), 'it is a disquisition, not a conversation.' And he adds, with one of his wilful back-handed blows at Plato, that most writers of dialogue plunge into abstruse questions, and 'collect a heap of arguments to be blown away by the bloated whiff of some rhetorical charlatan tricked out in a multiplicity of ribbons for the occasion.' Possibly! but for all that, the perfect dialogue ought not, we should say, to be really incoherent. It should include digressions, but the digressions ought to return upon the main subject. The art consists in preserving real unity in the midst of the superficial deviations rendered easy by this form of composition. The facility of digression is really a temptation, not a privilege. Anybody can write blank verse of a kind, because it so easily slips into prose; and that is why good blank verse is so rare. And so anybody can write a decent dialogue if you allow

him to ramble as we all do in actual talk. The finest philosophical dialogues are those in which a complete logical framework underlies the dramatic structure. They are a perfect fusion of logic and imagination. Instead of harsh divisions and cross-divisions of the subject, and a balance of abstract arguments, we have vivid portraits of human beings, each embodying a different line of thought. But the logic is still seen, though the more carefully hidden the more exquisite the skill of the artist. And the purely artistic dialogue which describes passion or the emotions arising from a given situation should in the same way set forth a single idea, and preserve a dramatic unity of conception at least as rigidly as a full-grown play. So far as Landor used his facilities as an excuse for rambling, instead of so skilfully subordinating them to the main purpose as to reproduce new variations on the central theme, he is clearly in error, or is at least aiming at a lower kind of excellence. And this, it may be said at once, seems to be the most radical defect in point of composition of Landor's 'Conversations.' They have the fault which his real talk is said to have exemplified. We are told that his temperament 'disqualified him for anything like sustained reasoning, and he instinctively backed away from discussion or argument.' Many of the written dialogues are a prolonged series of explosions; when one expects a continuous development of a theme, they are monotonous thunder-growls. Landor undoubtedly had a sufficient share of dramatic power to write short dialogues expressing a single situation with most admirable power, delicacy, and firmness of touch. Nor, again, does the criticism just made refer to those longer dialogues which are in reality a mere string of notes upon poems or proposals for reforms in spelling. The slight

dramatic form binds together his pencillings from the margins of 'Paradise Lost' or Wordsworth's poems very pleasantly, and enables him to give additional effect to vivacious outbursts of praise or censure. But the more elaborate dialogues suffer grievously from this absence of a true unity. There is not that skilful evolution of a central idea without the rigid formality of scientific discussion which we admire in the real masterpieces of the art. We have a conglomerate, not an organic growth; a series of observations set forth with never-failing elegance of style, and often with singular keenness of perception; but they do not take us beyond the starting-point. When Robinson Crusoe crossed the Pyrenees, his guide led him by such dexterous windings and gradual ascents that he found himself across the mountains before he knew where he was. With Landor it is just the opposite. After many digressions and ramblings we find ourselves back on the same side of the original question. We are marking time with admirable gracefulness, but somehow we are not advancing. Naturally flesh and blood grow weary when there is no apparent end to a discussion, except that the author must in time be wearied of performing variations upon a single theme.

We are more easily reconciled to some other faults which are rather due to expectations raised by his critics than to positive errors. No one, for example, would care to notice an anachronism, if Landor did not occasionally put in a claim for accuracy. I have no objection whatever to allow Hooker to console Bacon for his loss of the chancellorship, in calm disregard of the fact that Hooker died some twenty years before Bacon rose to that high office. The fault can be amended by substituting any other

name for Hooker's. Nor do I at all wish to find in Landor that kind of archæological accuracy which is sought by some composers of historical romances. Were it not that critics have asserted the opposite, it would be hardly worth while to say that Landor's style seldom condescends to adapt itself to the mouth of the speaker, and that from Demosthenes to Porson every interlocutor has palpably the true Landorian trick of speech. Here and there, it is true, the effect is rather unpleasant. Pericles and Aspasia are apt to indulge in criticism of English customs, and no weak regard for time and place prevents Eubulides from denouncing Canning to Demosthenes. The classical dress becomes so thin on such occasions, that even the small degree of illusion which one may fairly desiderate is too rudely interrupted. The actor does not disguise his voice enough for theatrical purposes. It is perhaps a more serious fault that the dialogue constantly lapses into monologue. We might often remove the names of the talkers as useless interruptions. Some conversations might as well be headed, in legal phraseology, Landor *v.* Landor, or at most Landor *v.* Landor and another—the other being some wretched man of straw or Guy Faux effigy dragged in to be belaboured with weighty aphorisms and talk obtrusive nonsense. Hence sometimes we resent a little the taking in vain of the name of some old friend. It is rather too hard upon Sam Johnson to be made a mere 'passive bucket' into which Horne Tooke may pump his philological notions, with scarcely a feeble sputter or two to represent his smashing retorts.

There is yet another criticism or two to be added. The extreme scrupulosity with which Landor polishes his style and removes superfluities from poetical narrative, smoothing

them at times till we can hardly grasp them, might have been applied to some of the wanton digressions in which the dialogues abound. We should have been glad if he had ruthlessly cut out two-thirds of the conversation between Richelieu and others, in which some charming English pastorals are mixed up with a quantity of unmistakable rubbish. But, for the most part, we can console ourselves by a smile. When Landor lowers his head and charges bull-like at the phantom of some king or priest, we are prepared for, and amused by, his impetuosity. Malesherbes discourses with great point and vigour upon French literature, and may fairly diverge into a little politics; but it is certainly comic when he suddenly remembers one of Landor's pet grievances, and the unlucky Rousseau has to discuss a question for which few people could be more ludicrously unfit—the details of a plan for reforming the institution of English justices of the peace. The grave dignity with which the subject is introduced gives additional piquancy to the absurdity. An occasional laugh at Landor is the more valuable because, to say the truth, one is not very likely to laugh with him. Nothing is more difficult for an author—as Landor himself observes in reference to Milton—than to decide upon his own merits as a wit or humorist. I am not quite sure that this is true; for I have certainly found authors distinctly fallible in judging of their own merits as poets and philosophers. But it is undeniable that many a man laughs at his own wit who has to laugh alone. I will not take upon myself to say that Landor was without humour; he has certainly a delicate gracefulness which may be classed with the finer kinds of humour; but if anybody (to take one instance) will read the story which Chaucer tells to Boccaccio and Petrarch and pronounce it

to be amusing, I can only say that his notions of humour differ materially from mine. Some of his wrathful satire against kings and priests has a vigour which is amusing; but the tact which enables him to avoid errors of taste of a different kind often fails him when he tries the facetious.

Blemishes such as these go some way, perhaps, to account for Landor's unpopularity. But they are such as might be amply redeemed by his vigour, his fulness, and unflagging energy of style. There is no equally voluminous author of great power who does not fall short of his own highest achievements in a large part of his work, and who is not open to the remark that his achievements are not all that we could have wished. It is doubtless best to take what we can get, and not to repine if we do not get something better, the possibility of which is suggested by the actual accomplishment. If Landor had united to his own powers those of Scott or Shakespeare, he would have been improved. Landor, repenting a little for some censures of Milton, says to Southey, 'Are we not somewhat like two little beggar-boys who, forgetting that they are in tatters, sit noticing a few stains and rents in their father's raiment?' 'But they love him,' replies Southey, and we feel the apology to be sufficient.

Can we make it in the case of Landor? Is he a man whom we can take to our hearts, treating his vagaries and ill-humours as we do the testiness of a valued friend? Or do we feel that he is one whom it is better to have for an acquaintance than for an intimate? The problem seems to have exercised those who knew him best in life. Many, like Southey or Napier, thought him a man of true nobility and tenderness of character, and looked upon his defects as mere superficial blemishes. If some who came closer seem to have

had a rather different opinion, we must allow that a man's personal defects are often unimportant in his literary capacity. It has been laid down as a general rule that poets cannot get on with their wives ; and yet they are poets in virtue of being lovable at the core. Landor's domestic troubles need not indicate an incapacity for meeting our sympathies any more than the domestic troubles of Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Burns, Byron, Shelley, or many others. In his poetry a man should show his best self ; and defects, important in the daily life which is made up of trifles, may cease to trouble us when admitted to the inmost recesses of his nature.

Landor, undoubtedly, may be loved ; but I fancy that he can be loved unreservedly only by a very narrow circle. For when we pass from the form to the substance—from the manner in which his message is delivered to the message itself—we find that the superficial defects rise from very deep roots. Whenever we penetrate to the underlying character, we find something harsh and uncongenial mixed with very high qualities. He has pronounced himself upon a wide range of subjects ; there is much criticism, some of it of a very rare and admirable order ; much theological and political disquisition ; and much exposition, in various forms, of the practical philosophy which every man imbibes according to his faculties in his passage through the world. It would be undesirable to discuss seriously his political or religious notions. To say the truth, they are not really worth discussing, for they are little more than vehement explosions of unreasoning prejudice. I do not know whether Landor would have approved the famous aspiration about strangling the last of kings with the entrails of the last priest, but some such sentiment seems to sum up all that he really has to

say. His doctrine so far coincides with that of Diderot and other revolutionists, though he has no sympathy with their social aspirations. His utterances, however, remind us too much—in substance, though not in form—of the rhetoric of debating societies. They are as factitious as the old-fashioned appeals to the memory of Brutus. They would doubtless make a sensation at the Union. Diogenes tells us that 'all nations, all cities, all communities, should combine in one great hunt, like that of the Scythians at the approach of winter, and follow it' (the kingly power, to wit) 'up, unrelentingly to its perdition. The diadem should designate the victim; all who wear it, all who offer it, all who bow to it, should perish.' Demosthenes, in less direct language, announces the same plan to Eubulides as the one truth, far more important than any other, and 'more conducive to whatever is desirable to the well-educated and free.' We laugh, not because the phrase is overstrained, or intended to have a merely dramatic truth, for Landor puts similar sentiments into the mouths of all his favourite speakers, but simply because we feel it to be a mere form of swearing. The language would have been less elegant, but the meaning just the same, if he had rapped out a good mouth-filling oath whenever he heard the name of king. When, in reference to some such utterances, Carlyle said that 'Landor's principle is mere rebellion,' Landor was much nettled, and declared himself to be in favour of authority. He despised American republicanism and regarded Venice as the pattern State. He sympathised in this, as in much else, with the theorists of Milton's time, and would have been approved by Harrington or Algernon Sidney; but, for all that, Carlyle seems pretty well to have hit the mark. Such republicanism is in

reality nothing more than the political expression of intense pride, or, if you prefer the word, self-respect. It is the sentiment of personal dignity, which could not bear the thought that he, Landor, should have to bow the knee to a fool like George III.; or that Milton should have been regarded as the inferior of such a sneak as Charles I. But the same feeling would have been just as much shocked by the claim of a demagogue to override high-spirited gentlemen. Mobs were every whit as vile as kings. He might have stood for Shakespeare's Coriolanus, if Coriolanus had not an unfortunate want of taste in his language. Landor, indeed, being never much troubled as to consistency, is fond of dilating on the absurdity of any kind of hereditary rank; but he sympathises, to his last fibre, with the spirit fostered by the existence of an aristocratic caste, and producible, so far as our experience has gone, in no other way. He is generous enough to hate all oppression in every form, and therefore to hate the oppression exercised by a noble as heartily as oppression exercised by a king. He is a big boy ready to fight anyone who bullies his fag; but with no doubts as to the merits of fagging. But then he never chooses to look at the awkward consequences of his opinion. When talking of politics, an aristocracy full of virtue and talent, ruling on generous principles a people sufficiently educated to obey its natural leaders, is the ideal which is vaguely before his mind. To ask how it is to be produced without hereditary rank, or to be prevented from degenerating into a tyrannical oligarchy, or to be reconciled at all with modern principles, is simply to be impertinent. He answers all such questions by putting himself in imagination into the attitude of a Pericles or Demosthenes or Milton, fulminating against tyrants and keeping the mob in its place by the

ascendency of genius. To recommend Venice as a model is simply to say that you have nothing but contempt for all politics. It is as if a lad should be asked whether he preferred to join a cavalry or an infantry regiment, and should reply that he would only serve under Leonidas.

His religious principles are in the same way little more than the assertion that he will not be fettered in mind or body by any priest on earth. The priest is to him what he was to the deists and materialists of the eighteenth century —a juggling impostor who uses superstition as an instrument for creeping into the confidence of women and cowards, and burning brave men ; but he has no dreams of the advent of a religion of reason. He ridicules the notion that truth will prevail ; it never has and it never will. At bottom he prefers paganism to Christianity because it was tolerant and encouraged art, and allowed philosophers to enjoy as much privilege as they can ever really enjoy—that of living in peace and knowing that their neighbours are harmless fools. After a fashion he likes his own version of Christianity, which is superficially that of many popular preachers : Be tolerant, kindly, and happy, and don't worry your head about dogmas, or become a slave to priests. But then one also feels that humility is generally regarded as an essential part of Christianity, and that in Landor's version it is replaced by something like its antithesis. You should do good, too, as you respect yourself and would be respected by men ; but the chief good is the philosophic mind, which can wrap itself in its own consciousness of worth, and enjoy the finest pleasures of life without superstitious asceticism. Let the vulgar amuse themselves with the playthings of their creed, so long as they do not take to playing with faggots.

Stand apart and enjoy your own superiority with good-natured contempt.

One of his longest and, in this sense, most characteristic dialogues, is that between Penn and Peterborough. Peterborough is the ideal aristocrat with a contempt for the actual aristocracy; and Penn represents the religion of common-sense. 'Teach men to calculate rightly and thou wilt have taught them to live religiously,' is Penn's sentiment, and perhaps not too unfaithful to the original. No one could have a more thorough contempt for the mystical element in Quakerism than Landor; but he loves Quakers as sober, industrious, easy-going people, who regard good-humour and comfort as the ultimate aim of religious life, and who manage to do without lawyers or priests. Peterborough, meanwhile, represents his other side—the haughty, energetic, cultivated aristocrat, who, on the ground of their common aversions, can hold out a friendly hand to the quiet Quaker. Landor, of course, is both at once. He is the noble who rather enjoys giving a little scandal at times to his drab-suited companion; but, on the whole, thinks that it would be an excellent world if the common people would adopt this harmless form of religion, which tolerates other opinions and does not give any leverage to kings, insolvent aristocrats, or intriguing bishops.

Landor's critical utterances reveal the same tendencies. Much of the criticism has of course an interest of its own. It is the judgment of a real master of language upon many technical points of style, and the judgment, moreover, of a poet who can look even upon classical poets as one who breathes the same atmosphere at an equal elevation, and who speaks out like a cultivated gentleman, not as a schoolmaster or a specialist. But putting aside this and the crotchets about

spelling, which have been dignified with the name of philological theories, the general direction of his sympathies is eminently characteristic. Landor of course pays the inevitable homage to the great names of Plato, Dante, and Shakespeare, and yet it would be scarcely unfair to say that he hates Plato, that Dante gives him far more annoyance than pleasure, and that he really cares little for Shakespeare. The last might be denied on the ground of isolated expressions. 'A rib of Shakespeare,' he says, 'would have made a Milton; the same portion of Milton all poets born ever since.' But he speaks of Shakespeare in conventional terms, and seldom quotes or alludes to him. When he touches Milton his eyes brighten and his voice takes a tone of reverent enthusiasm. His ear is dissatisfied with everything for days and weeks after the harmony of 'Paradise Lost.' 'Leaving this magnificent temple, I am hardly to be pacified by the fairly-built chambers, the rich cupboards of embossed plate, and the omnigenous images of Shakespeare.' That is his genuine impression. Some readers may appeal to that 'Examination of Shakespeare' which (as we have seen) was held by Lamb to be beyond the powers of any other writer except its hero. I confess that, in my opinion, Lamb could have himself drawn a far more sympathetic portrait of Shakespeare, and that Scott would have brought out the whole scene with incomparably greater vividness. Call it a morning in an English country-house in the sixteenth century, and it will be full of charming passages along with some laborious failures. But when we are forced to think of Slender and Shallow, and Sir Hugh Evans, and the Shakespearian method of portraiture, the personages in Landor's talk seem half asleep and terribly given to twaddle His view of Dante is less equivocal. In the whole 'Inferno,'

Petrarca (evidently representing Landor) finds nothing admirable but the famous descriptions of Francesca and Ugolino. They are the 'greater and lesser oases' in a vast desert. And he would pare one of these fine passages to the quick, whilst the other provokes the remark ('we must whisper it') that Dante is 'the great master of the disgusting.' He seems really to prefer Boccaccio and Ovid, to say nothing of Homer and Virgil. Plato is denounced still more unsparingly. From Aristotle and Diogenes down to Lord Chatham, assailants are set on to worry him, and tear to pieces his gorgeous robes with just an occasional perfunctory apology. Even Lady Jane Grey is deprived of her favourite. She consents on Ascham's petition to lay aside books, but she excepts Cicero, Epictetus, Plutarch, and Polybius: the 'others I do resign;' they are good for the arbour and garden walk, but not for the fireside or pillow. This is surely to wrong the poor soul; but Landor is intolerant in his enthusiasm for his philosophical favourites. Epicurus is the teacher whom he really delights to honour, and Cicero is forced to confess in his last hours that he has nearly come over to the camp of his old adversary.

It is easy to interpret the meaning of these prejudices. Landor hates and despises the romantic and the mystic. He has not the least feeling for the art which owes its powers to suggestions of the infinite, or to symbols forced into grotesqueness by the effort to express that for which no thought can be adequate. He refuses to bother himself with allegory or dreamy speculation, and, unlike Sir T. Browne, hates to lose himself in an 'O Altitudo!' He cares nothing for Dante's inner thoughts, and sees only a hideous chamber of horrors in the 'Inferno.' Plato is a mere compiler of idle sophistries, and contemptible to the

common-sense and worldly wisdom of Locke and Bacon. In the same spirit he despised Wordsworth's philosophising as heartily as Jeffrey, and, though he tried to be just, could really see nothing in him except the writer of good rustic idylls, and of one good piece of paganism, the 'Laodamia.'[1] From such a point of view he ranks him below Burns, Scott, and Cowper, and makes poor Southey consent—Southey who ranked Wordsworth with Milton !

These tendencies are generally summed up by speaking of Landor's objectivity and Hellenism. I have no particular objection to those words except that they seem rather vague and to leave our problem untouched. A man may be as 'objective' as you please in a sense, and as thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Greek art, and yet may manage to fall in with the spirit of our own times. The truth is, I fancy, that a simpler name may be given to Landor's tastes, and that we may find them exemplified nearer home. There is many a good country gentleman who rides well to hounds, and is most heartily 'objective' in the sense of hating metaphysics and elaborate allegory and unintelligible art, and preferring a glass of wine and a talk with a charming young lady to mystic communings with the world-spirit ; and as for Landor's Hellenism, that surely ought not to be an uncommon phenomenon in the region of English public schools. It is an odd circumstance that we should be so much puzzled by the very man who seems to realise precisely that ideal of culture upon which our most popular system of education is apparently moulded. Here at last

[1] De Quincey gets into a curious puzzle about Landor's remarks in his essay on Milton *versus* Southey and Landor. He cannot understand to which of Wordsworth's poems Landor is referring, and makes some oddly erroneous guesses.

is a man who is really simple-minded enough to take the habit of writing Latin verses seriously ; making it a consolation in trouble as well as an elegant amusement. He hopes to rest his fame upon it, and even by a marvellous *tour de force* writes a great deal of English poetry which for all the world reads exactly like a first-rate copy of modern Greek Iambics. For once we have produced, just what the system ought constantly to produce, and yet we cannot make him out.

The reason for our not producing more Landors is indeed pretty simple. Men of real poetic genius are exceedingly rare at all times, and it is still rarer to find such a man who remains a schoolboy all his life. Landor is precisely a glorified and sublime edition of the model sixth-form lad, only with an unusually strong infusion of schoolboy perversion. Perverse lads, indeed, generally kick over the traces at an earlier point : and refuse to learn anything. Boys who take kindly to the classical system are generally good—that is to say, docile. They develop into prosaic tutors and professors ; or, when the cares of life begin to press, they start their cargo of classical lumber and fill the void with law or politics. Landor's peculiar temperament led him to kick against authority, whilst he yet imbibed the spirit of the teaching fully, and in some respects rather too fully. He was a rebel against the outward form, and yet more faithful in spirit than most of the obedient subjects.

The impatient and indomitable temper which made quiet or continuous meditation impossible, and the accidental circumstances of his life, left him in possession of qualities which are in most men subdued or expelled by the hard discipline of life. Brought into impulsive collision with all kinds of authorities, he set up a kind of schoolboy

republicanism, and used all his poetic eloquence to give it an air of reality. But he never cared to bring it into harmony with any definite system of thought, or let his outbursts of temper transport him into settled antagonism with accepted principles. He troubled himself just as little about theological as about political theories ; he was as utterly impervious as the dullest of squires to the mystic philosophy imported by Coleridge, and found the world quite rich enough in sources of enjoyment without tormenting himself about the unseen, and the ugly superstitions which thrive in mental twilight. But he had quarrelled with parsons as much as with lawyers, and could not stand the thought of a priest interfering with his affairs or limiting his amusements. And so he set up as a tolerant and hearty disciple of Epicurus. Chivalrous sentiment and an exquisite perception of the beautiful saved him from any gross interpretation of his master's principles ; although, to say the truth, he shows an occasional laxity on some points which savours of the easy-going pagan, or perhaps of the noble of the old school. As he grew up he drank deep of English literature, and sympathised with the grand republican pride of Milton—as sturdy a rebel as himself, and a still nobler because more serious rhetorician. He went to Italy, and, as he imbibed Italian literature, sympathised with the joyous spirit of Boccaccio and the eternal boyishness of classical art. Mediævalism and all mystic philosophies remained unintelligible to this true-born Englishman. Irritated rather than humbled by his incapacity, he cast them aside, pretty much as a schoolboy might throw a Plato at the head of a pedantic master.

The best and most attractive dialogues are those in which he can give free play to this Epicurean sentiment ; forget his political mouthing, and inoculate us for the

moment with the spirit of youthful enjoyment. Nothing can be more perfectly charming in its way than Epicurus in his exquisite garden, discoursing on his pleasant knoll, where, with violets, cyclamens, and convolvuluses clustering round, he talks to his lovely girl-disciples upon the true theory of life—temperate enjoyment of all refined pleasures, forgetfulness of all cares, and converse with true chosen spirits far from the noise of the profane vulgar: of the art, in short, by which a man of fine cultivation may make the most of this life, and learn to take death as a calm and happy subsidence into oblivion. Nor far behind is the dialogue in which Lucullus entertains Cæsar in his delightful villa, and illustrates by example, as well as precept, Landor's favourite doctrine of the vast superiority of the literary to the active life. Politics, as he makes even Demosthenes admit, are the 'sad refuge of restless minds, averse from business and from study.' And certainly there are moods in which we could ask nothing better than to live in a remote villa, in which wealth and art have done everything in their power to give all the pleasures compatible with perfect refinement and contempt of the grosser tastes. Only it must be admitted that this is not quite a gospel for the million. And probably the highest triumph is in the Pentameron, where the whole scene is so vividly coloured by so many delicate touches, and such charming little episodes of Italian life, that we seem almost to have seen the fat, wheezy poet hoisting himself on to his pampered steed, to have listened to the village gossip, and followed the little flirtations in which the true poets take so kindly an interest; and are quite ready to pardon certain useless digressions and critical vagaries, and to overlook complacently any little laxity of morals.

These, and many of the shorter and more dramatic

dialogues, have a rare charm, and the critic will return to analyse, if he can, their technical qualities. But little explanation can be needed, after reading them, of Landor's want of popularity. If he had applied one-tenth part of his literary skill to expand commonplace sentiment; if he had talked that kind of gentle twaddle by which some recent essayists edify their readers, he might have succeeded in gaining a wide popularity. Or if he had been really, as some writers seem to fancy, a deep and systematic thinker as well as a most admirable artist, he might have extorted a hearing even while provoking dissent. But his boyish waywardness has disqualified him from reaching the deeper sympathies of either class. We feel that the most superhuman of schoolboys has really a rather shallow view of life. His various outbursts of wrath amuse us at best when they do not bore, even though they take the outward form of philosophy or statesmanship. He has really no answer or vestige of answer for any problems of his, nor indeed of any other time, for he has no basis of serious thought. All he can say is, ultimately, that he feels himself in a very uncongenial atmosphere, from which it is delightful to retire, in imagination, to the society of Epicurus, or the study of a few literary masterpieces. That may be very true, but it can be interesting only to a few men of similar taste; and men of profound insight, whether of the poetic or the philosophic temperament, are apt to be vexed by his hasty dogmatism and irritable rejection of much which deserved his sympathy. His wanton quarrel with the world has been avenged by the world's indifference. We may regret the result when we see what rare qualities have been cruelly wasted, but we cannot fairly shut our eyes to the fact that the world has a very strong case.

MACAULAY

Lord Macaulay was pre-eminently a fortunate man ; and his good fortune has survived him. Few, indeed, in the long line of English authors whom he loved so well, have been equally happy in a biographer. Most official biographies are a mixture of bungling and indiscretion. It is only in virtue of some happy coincidence that the one or two people who alone have the requisite knowledge can produce also the requisite skill and discretion. Mr. Trevelyan is one of the exceptions to the rule. His book is such a piece of thorough literary workmanship as would have delighted its subject. By a rare felicity, the almost filial affection of the narrator conciliates the reader instead of exciting a distrust of the narrative. We feel that Macaulay's must have been a lovable character to excite such warmth of feeling, and a noble character to enable one who loved him to speak so frankly. The ordinary biographer's idolatry is not absent, but it becomes a testimony to the hero's excellence instead of introducing a disturbing element into our estimate of his merits.

No reader of Macaulay's works will be surprised at the manliness which is stamped not less plainly upon them than upon his whole career. But few who were not in some degree behind the scenes would be prepared for the tenderness of nature which is equally conspicuous. We all recognised in Macaulay a lover of truth and political honour.

We find no more than we expected, when we are told that the one circumstance upon which he looked back with some regret was the unauthorised publication by a constituent of a letter in which he had spoken too frankly of a political ally. That is indeed an infinitesimal stain upon the character of a man who rose without wealth or connection, by sheer force of intellect, to a conspicuous position amongst politicians. But we find something more than we expected in the singular beauty of Macaulay's domestic life. In his relations to his father, his sisters, and the younger generation, he was admirable. The stern religious principle and profound absorption in philanthropic labours of old Zachary Macaulay must have made the position of his brilliant son anything but an easy one. He could hardly read a novel, or contribute to a worldly magazine, without calling down something like a reproof. The father seems to have indulged in the very questionable practice of listening to vague gossip about his son's conduct, and demanding explanations from the supposed culprit. The stern old gentleman carefully suppressed his keen satisfaction at his son's first oratorical success, and, instead of praising him, growled at him for folding his arms in the presence of royalty. Many sons have turned into consummate hypocrites under such paternal discipline ; and, as a rule, the system is destructive of anything like mutual confidence. Macaulay seems, in spite of all, to have been on the most cordial terms with his father to the last. Some suppression of his sentiments must indeed have been necessary ; and we cannot avoid tracing certain peculiarities of the son's intellectual career to his having been condemned from an early age to habitual reticence upon the deepest of all subjects of thought.

Macaulay's relations to his sisters are sufficiently revealed in a long series of charming letters, showing, both in their playfulness and in their literary and political discussions, the unreserved respect and confidence which united them. One of them writes upon his death: 'We have lost the light of our home, the most tender, loving, generous, unselfish, devoted of friends. What he was to me for fifty years who can tell? What a world of love he poured out upon me and mine!' Reading these words at the close of the biography, we do not wonder at the glamour of sisterly affection; but admit them to be the natural expression of a perfectly sincere conviction. Can there be higher praise? His relation to children is equally charming. 'He was beyond comparison the best of playfellows,' writes Mr. Trevelyan; 'unrivalled in the invention of games, and never weary of repeating them.' He wrote long letters to his favourites; he addressed pretty little poems to them on their birthdays, and composed long nursery rhymes for their edification; whilst overwhelmed with historical labours, and grudging the demands of society, he would dawdle away whole mornings with them, and spend the afternoon in taking them to sights; he would build up a den with newspapers behind the sofa, and act the part of tiger or brigand; he would take them to the Tower, or Madame Tussaud's, or the Zoological Gardens, make puns to enliven the Polytechnic, and tell innumerable anecdotes to animate the statues in the British Museum; nor, as they grew older, did he neglect the more dignified duty of inoculating them with the literary tastes which had been the consolation of his life. Obviously he was the ideal uncle—the uncle of optimistic fiction, but with qualifications for his task such as few fictitious uncles can possess. It need hardly be added that Macaulay was a man

of noble liberality in money matters, that he helped his family when they were in difficulties, and was beloved by the servants who depended upon him. In his domestic relations he had, according to his nephew, only one serious fault—he did not appreciate canine excellence ; but no man is perfect.

The thorough kindliness of the man reconciles us even to his good fortune. He was an infant phenomenon ; the best boy at school ; in his college days, 'ladies, artists, politicians, and diners-out' at Bowood, formed a circle to hear him talk, from breakfast to dinner-time ; he was famous as an author at twenty-five ; accepted as a great parliamentary orator at thirty ; and, as a natural consequence, caressed with effusion by editors, politicians, Whig magnates, and the clique of Holland House ; by thirty-three he had become a man of mark in society, literature, and politics, and had secured his fortune by gaining a seat in the Indian Council. His later career was a series of triumphs. He had been the main support of the greatest literary organ of his party, and the 'Essays' republished from its pages became at once a standard work. The 'Lays of Ancient Rome' sold like Scott's most popular poetry ; the 'History' caused an excitement almost unparalleled in literary annals. Not only was the first sale enormous, but it has gone on ever since increasing. The popular author was equally popular in Parliament. The benches were crammed to listen to the rare treat of his eloquence ; and he had the far rarer glory of more than once turning the settled opinion of the House by a single speech. It is a more vulgar but a striking testimony to his success that he made 20,000*l.* in one year by literature. Other authors have had their heads turned by less triumphant careers ; they have descended to

lower ambition, and wasted their lives in spasmodic straining to gain worthless applause. Macaulay remained faithful to his calling. He worked his hardest to the last, and became a more unsparing critic of his own performances as time went on. We do not feel even a passing symptom of a grudge against his good fortune. Rather we are moved by that kind of sentiment which expresses itself in the schoolboy phrase, 'Well done our side!' We are glad to see the hearty, kindly, truthful man crowned with all appropriate praise, and to think that for once one of our race has got so decidedly the best of it in the hard battle with the temptations and the miseries of life.

Certain shortcomings have been set off against these virtues by critics of Macaulay's life. He was, it has been said, too good a hater. At any rate, he hated vice, meanness, and charlatanism. It is easier to hate such things too little than too much. But it must be admitted that his likes and dislikes indicate a certain rigidity and narrowness of nature. 'In books, as in people and places,' says Mr. Trevelyan, 'he loved that, and loved that only, to which he had been accustomed from boyhood upwards.' The faults of which this significant remark reveals one cause, are marked upon his whole literary character. Macaulay was converted to Whiggism when at college. The advance from Toryism to Whiggism is not such as to involve a very violent wrench of the moral and intellectual nature. Such as it was, it was the only wrench from which Macaulay suffered. What he was as a scholar of Trinity, he was substantially as a peer of the realm. He made, it would seem, few new friends, though he grappled his old ones as 'with hooks of steel.' The fault is one which belongs to many men of strong natures, and so long as we are

considering Macaulay's life we shall not be much disposed to quarrel with his innate conservatism. Strong affections are so admirable a quality that we can pardon the man who loves well though not widely ; and if Macaulay had not a genuine fervour of regard for the little circle of his intimates, there is no man who deserves such praise.

It is when we turn from Macaulay's personal character to attempt an estimate of his literary position, that these faults acquire more importance. His intellectual force was extraordinary within certain limits ; beyond those limits the giant became a child. He assimilated a certain set of ideas as a lad, and never acquired a new idea in later life. He accumulated vast stores of knowledge, but they all fitted into the old framework of theory. Whiggism seemed to him to provide a satisfactory solution for all political problems when he was sending his first article to 'Knight's Magazine,' and when he was writing the last page of his 'History.' 'I entered public life a Whig,' as he said in 1849, 'and a Whig I am determined to remain.' And what is meant by Whiggism in Macaulay's mouth? It means substantially that creed which registers the experience of the English upper classes during the four or five generations previous to Macaulay. It represents, not the reasoning, but the instinctive convictions generated by the dogged insistence upon their privileges of a stubborn, high-spirited, and individually short-sighted race. To deduce it as a symmetrical doctrine from abstract propositions would be futile. It is only reasonable so far as a creed, felt out by the collective instinct of a number of more or less stupid people, becomes impressed with a quasi-rational unity, not from their respect for logic, but from the uniformity of the mode of development. Hatred

to pure reason is indeed one of its first principles. A doctrine avowedly founded on logic instead of instinct becomes for that very reason suspect to it. Common-sense takes the place of philosophy. At times this mass of sentiment opposes itself under stress of circumstances to the absolute theories of monarchy, and then calls itself Whiggism. At other times it offers an equally dogged resistance to absolute theories of democracy, and then becomes nominally Tory. In Macaulay's youth the weight of opinion had been slowly swinging round from the Toryism generated by dread of revolution, to Whiggism generated by the accumulation of palpable abuses. The growing intelligence and more rapidly growing power of the middle classes gave it at the same time a more popular character than before. Macaulay's 'conversion' was simply a process of swinging with the tide. The Clapham Sect, amongst whom he had been brought up, was already more than half Whig, in virtue of its attack upon the sacred institution of slavery by means of popular agitation. Macaulay—the most brilliant of its young men—naturally cast in his lot with the brilliant men, a little older than himself, who fought under the blue and yellow banner of the 'Edinburgh Review.' No great change of sentiment was necessary, though some of the old Clapham doctrines died out in his mind as he was swept into the political current.

Macaulay thus early became a thoroughgoing Whig. Whiggism seemed to him the *ne plus ultra* of progress: the pure essence of political wisdom. He was never fully conscious of the vast revolution in thought which was going on all around him. He was saturated with the doctrines of 1832. He stated them with unequalled vigour and clearness. Anybody who disputed them from either side of the

question seemed to him to be little better than a fool. Southey and Mr. Gladstone talked arrant nonsense when they disputed the logical or practical value of the doctrines laid down by Locke. James Mill deserved the most contemptuous language for daring to push those doctrines beyond the sacred line. When Macaulay attacks an old non-juror or a modern Tory, we can only wonder how opinions which, on his showing, are so inconceivably absurd, could ever have been held by any human being. Men are Whigs or not-Whigs, and the not-Whig is less a heretic to be anathematised than a blockhead beneath the reach of argument. All political wisdom centres in Holland House, and the 'Edinburgh Review' is its prophet. There is something in the absolute confidence of Macaulay's political dogmatism which varies between the sublime and the ridiculous. We can hardly avoid laughing at this superlative self-satisfaction, and yet we must admit that it is indicative of a real political force not to be treated with simple contempt. Belief is power, even when belief is most unreasonable.

To define a Whig and to define Macaulay is pretty much the same thing. Let us trace some of the qualities which enabled one man to become so completely the type of a vast body of his compatriots.

The first and most obvious power in which Macaulay excelled his neighbours was his portentous memory. He could assimilate printed pages, says his nephew, more quickly than others could glance over them. Whatever he read was stamped upon his mind instantaneously and permanently, and he read everything. In the midst of severe labours in India, he read enough classical authors to stock the mind of an ordinary professor. At the same time he framed a

criminal code and devoured masses of trashy novels. From the works of the ancient Fathers of the Church to English political pamphlets and to modern street ballads, no printed matter came amiss to his omnivorous appetite. All that he had read could be reproduced at a moment's notice. Every fool, he said, can repeat his Archbishops of Canterbury backwards; and he was as familiar with the Cambridge Calendar as the most devout Protestant with the Bible. He could have re-written 'Sir Charles Grandison' from memory if every copy had been lost. Now it might perhaps be plausibly maintained that the possession of such a memory is unfavourable to a high development of the reasoning powers. The case of Pascal, indeed, who is said never to have forgotten anything, shows that the two powers may co-exist; and other cases might of course be mentioned. But it is true that a powerful memory may enable a man to save himself the trouble of reasoning. It encourages the indolent propensity of deciding difficulties by precedent instead of principles. Macaulay, for example, was once required to argue the point of political casuistry as to the degree of independent action permissible to members of a Cabinet. An ordinary mind would have to answer by striking a rough balance between the conveniences and inconveniences likely to arise. It would be forced, that is to say, to reason from the nature of the case. But Macaulay had at his fingers' end every instance from the days of Walpole to his own in which Ministers had been allowed to vote against the general policy of the Government. By quoting them, he seemed to decide the point by authority, instead of taking the troublesome and dangerous road of abstract reasoning. Thus to appeal to experience is with him to appeal to the stores of a gigantic

memory; and is generally the same thing as to deny the value of all general rules. This is the true Whig doctrine of referring to precedent rather than to theory. Our popular leaders were always glad to quote Hampden and Sidney instead of venturing upon the dangerous ground of abstract rights.

Macaulay's love of deciding all points by an accumulation of appropriate instances is indeed characteristic of his mind. It is connected with a curious defect of analytical power. It appears in his literary criticism as much as in his political speculations. In an interesting letter to Mr. Napier, he states the case himself as an excuse for not writing upon Scott. 'Hazlitt used to say, "I am nothing if not critical." The case with me,' says Macaulay, 'is precisely the reverse. I have a strong and acute enjoyment of works of the imagination, but I have never habituated myself to dissect them. Perhaps I enjoy them the more keenly for that very reason. Such books as Lessing's "Laocoon," such passages as the criticism on "Hamlet" in "Wilhelm Meister," fill me with wonder and despair.' If we take any of Macaulay's criticisms, we shall see how truly he had gauged his own capacity. They are either random discharges of superlatives or vigorous assertions of sound moral principles. He compliments some favourite author with an emphatic repetition of the ordinary eulogies, or shows conclusively that Montgomery was a sham poet, and Wycherley a corrupt ribald. Nobody can hit a haystack with more certainty, but he is not so good at a difficult mark. He never makes a fine suggestion as to the secrets of the art whose products he admires or describes. His mode, for example, of criticising Bunyan is to give a list of the passages which he remembers, and of course he remembers everything.

He observes, what is tolerably clear, that Bunyan's allegory is as vivid as a concrete history, though strangely comparing him in this respect to Shelley—the least concrete of poets ; and he makes the discovery, which did not require his vast stores of historical knowledge, 'that it is impossible to doubt that' Bunyan's trial of Christian and Faithful is meant to satirise the judges of the time of Charles II. That is as plain as the intention of the last cartoon in 'Punch.' Macaulay can draw a most vivid portrait, so far as that can be done by a picturesque accumulation of characteristic facts, but he never gets below the surface, or details the principles whose embodiment he describes from without.

The defect is connected with further peculiarities, in which Macaulay is the genuine representative of the true Whig type. The practical value of adherence to precedent is obvious. It may be justified by the assertion that all sound political philosophy must be based upon experience : and no one will deny that assertion to contain a most important truth. But in Macaulay's mind this sound doctrine seems to be confused with the very questionable doctrine that in political questions there is no philosophy at all. To appeal to experience may mean either to appeal to facts so classified and systematically arranged as to illustrate general truths, or to appeal to a mere mass of observations, without taking the trouble to elicit their true significance, or even to believe that they can be resolved into particular cases of a general truth. This is the difference between an experimental philosophy and a crude empiricism. Macaulay takes the lower alternative. The vigorous attack upon James Mill, which he very properly suppressed during his life on account of its juvenile arrogance, curiously illustrates his mode of thought. No one can deny, I think, that he makes

some very good points against a very questionable system of political dogmatism. But when we ask what are Macaulay's own principles, we are left at a stand. He ought, by all his intellectual sympathies, to be a utilitarian. Yet he treats utilitarianism with the utmost contempt, though he has no alternative theory to suggest. He ends his first Essay against Mill by one of his customary purple patches about Baconian induction. He tells us, in the second, how to apply it. Bacon proposed to discover the principle of heat by observing in what qualities all hot bodies agreed, and in what qualities all cold bodies. Similarly, we are to make a list of all constitutions which have produced good or bad government, and to investigate their points of agreement and difference. This sounds plausible to the uninstructed, but is a mere rhetorical flourish. Bacon's method is admittedly inadequate for reasons which I leave to men of science to explain, and Macaulay's method is equally hopeless in politics. It is hopeless for the simple reason that the complexity of the phenomena makes it impracticable. We cannot find out what constitution is best after this fashion, simply because the goodness or badness of a constitution depends upon a thousand conditions of social, moral, and intellectual development. When stripped of its pretentious phraseology, Macaulay's teaching comes simply to this : the only rule in politics is the rule of thumb. All general principles are wrong or futile. We have found out in England that our constitution, constructed in absolute defiance of all *à priori* reasoning, is the best in the world : it is the best for providing us with the maximum of bread, beef, beer, and means of buying bread, beer, and beef : and we have got it because we have never—like those publicans the French—trusted to fine sayings about truth and justice and human

rights, but blundered on, adding a patch here and knocking a hole there, as our humour prompted us.

This sovereign contempt of all speculation—simply as speculation—reaches its acme in the Essay on Bacon. The curious naïveté with which Macaulay denounces all philosophy in that vigorous production excites a kind of perverse admiration. How can one refuse to admire the audacity which enables a man explicitly to identify philosophy with humbug? It is what ninety-nine men out of a hundred think, but not one in a thousand dares to say. Goethe says somewhere that he likes Englishmen because English fools are the most thoroughgoing of fools. English 'Philistines,' as represented by Macaulay, the prince of Philistines, according to Matthew Arnold, carry their contempt of the higher intellectual interests to a pitch of real sublimity. Bacon's theory of induction, says Macaulay, in so many words, was valueless. Everybody could reason before it as well as after. But Bacon really performed a service of inestimable value to mankind; and it consisted precisely in this, that he called their attention from philosophy to the pursuit of material advantages. The old philosophers had gone on bothering about theology, ethics, and the true and beautiful, and such other nonsense. Bacon taught us to work at chemistry and mechanics, to invent diving-bells and steam-engines and spinning-jennies. We could never, it seems, have found out the advantages of this direction of our energies without a philosopher, and so far philosophy is negatively good. It has written up upon all the supposed avenues to inquiry, 'No admission except on business;' that is, upon the business of direct practical discovery. We English have taken the hint, and we have therefore lived to see when a man can breakfast in London

and dine in Edinburgh, and may look forward to a day when the tops of Ben-Nevis and Helvellyn will be cultivated like flower-gardens, and when machines constructed on principles yet to be discovered will be in every house.

The theory which underlies this conclusion is often explicitly stated. All philosophy has produced mere futile logomachy. Greek sages and Roman moralists and mediæval schoolmen have amassed words, and amassed nothing else. One distinct discovery of a solid truth, however humble, is worth all their labours. This condemnation applies not only to philosophy, but to the religious embodiment of philosophy. No satisfactory conclusion ever has been reached or ever will be reached in theological disputes. On all such topics, he tells Mr. Gladstone, there has always been the widest divergence of opinion. Nor are there better hopes for the future. The ablest minds, he says in the Essay upon Ranke, have believed in transubstantiation ; that is, according to him, in the most ineffable nonsense. There is no certainty that men will not believe to the end of time the doctrines which imposed upon so able a man as Sir Thomas More. Not only, that is, have men been hitherto wandering in a labyrinth without a clue, but there is no chance that any clue will ever be found. The doctrine, so familiar to our generation, of laws of intellectual development, never even occurs to him. The collective thought of generations marks time without advancing. A guess of Sir Thomas More is as good or as bad as the guess of the last philosopher. This theory, if true, implies utter scepticism. And yet Macaulay was clearly not a sceptic. His creed was hidden under a systematic reticence, and he resisted every attempt to raise the veil with rather superfluous indignation. When a constituent dared to ask about his religious views, he denounced the rash inquirer in

terms applicable to an agent of the Inquisition. He vouchsafed, indeed, the information that he was a Christian. We may accept the phrase, not only on the strength of his invariable sincerity, but because it falls in with the general turn of his arguments. He denounces the futility of the ancient moralists, but he asserts the enormous social value of Christianity.

His attitude, in fact, is equally characteristic of the man and his surroundings. The old Clapham teaching had faded in his mind: it had not produced a revolt. He retained the old hatred for slavery; and he retained, with the whole force of his affectionate nature, reverence for the school of Wilberforce, Thornton, and his own father. He estimated most highly, not perhaps more highly than they deserved, the value of the services rendered by them in awakening the conscience of the nation. In their persistent and disinterested labours he recognised a manifestation of the great social force of Christianity. But a belief that Christianity is useful, and even that it is true, may consist with a profound conviction of the futility of the philosophy with which it has been associated. Here again Macaulay is a true Whig. The Whig love of precedent, the Whig hatred for abstract theories, may consist with a Tory application. But the true Whig differed from the Tory in adding to these views an invincible suspicion of parsons. The first Whig battles were fought against the Church as much as against the King. From the struggle with Sacheverell down to the struggle for Catholic emancipation, Toryism and High-Church principles were associated against Whigs and Dissenters. By that kind of dumb instinct which outruns reason, the Whig had learnt that there was some occult bond of union between the claims of a priesthood and the

claims of a monarchy. The old maxim, 'No bishop, no king,' suggested the opposite principle that you must keep down the clergy if you would limit the monarchy. The natural interpretation of this prejudice into political theory, is that the Church is extremely useful as an ally of the constable, but possesses a most dangerous explosive power if allowed to claim independent authority. In practice we must resist all claims of the Church to dictate to the State. In theory we must deny the foundation upon which such claims can alone be founded. Dogmatism must be pronounced to be fundamentally irrational. Nobody knows anything about theology ; or what is the same thing, no two people agree. As they don't agree, they cannot claim to impose their beliefs upon others.

This sentiment comes out curiously in the characteristic Essay just mentioned. Macaulay says, in reply to Mr. Gladstone, that there is no more reason for the introduction of religious questions into State affairs than for introducing them into the affairs of a Canal Company. He puts his argument with an admirable vigour and clearness which blinds many readers to the fact that he is begging the question by evading the real difficulty. If, in fact, Government had as little to do as a Canal Company with religious opinion, we should have long ago learnt the great lesson of toleration. But that is just the very *crux*. Can we draw the line between the spiritual and the secular? Nothing, replies Macaulay, is easier; and his method has been already indicated. We all agree that we don't want to be robbed or murdered : we are by no means all agreed about the doctrine of Trinity. But, says a churchman, a certain creed is necessary to men's moral and spiritual welfare, and therefore of the utmost importance even for the prevention

of robbery and murder. This is what Macaulay implicitly denies. The whole of dogmatic theology belongs to that region of philosophy, metaphysics, or whatever you please to call it, in which men are doomed to dispute for ever without coming any nearer to a decision. All that the statesman has to do with such matters is to see that if men are fools enough to speculate, they shall not be allowed to cut each other's throats when they reach, as they always must reach, contradictory results. If you raise a difficult point—such, for example, as the education question—Macaulay replies, as so many people have replied before and since, Teach the people 'those principles of morality which are common to all the forms of Christianity.' That is easier said than done! The plausibility of the solution in Macaulay's mouth is due to the fundamental assumption that everything except morality is hopeless ground of inquiry. Once get beyond the Ten Commandments and you will sink to a bottomless morass of argument, counter-argument, quibble, logomachy, superstition, and confusion worse confounded.

In Macaulay's teaching, as in that of his party, there is doubtless much that is noble. He has a righteous hatred of oppression in all shapes and disguises. He can tear to pieces with great logical power many of the fallacies alleged by his opponents. Our sympathies are certainly with him as against men who advocate persecution on any grounds, and he is fully qualified to crush his ordinary opponents. But it is plain that his whole political and (if we may use the word) philosophical teaching rests on something like a downright aversion to the higher order of speculation. He despises it. He wants something tangible and concrete—something in favour of which he may appeal to the imme-

diate testimony of the senses. He must feel his feet planted on the solid earth. The pain of attempting to soar into higher regions is not compensated to him by the increased width of horizon. And in this respect he is but the type of most of his countrymen, and reflects what has been (as I should say) erroneously called their 'unimaginative' view of things in general.

Macaulay, at any rate, distinctly belongs to the imaginative class of minds, if only in virtue of his instinctive preference of the concrete to the abstract, and his dislike, already noticed, to analysis. He has a thirst for distinct and vivid images. He reasons by examples instead of appealing to formulæ. There is a characteristic account in Mr. Trevelyan's volumes of his habit of rambling amongst the older parts of London, his fancy teeming with stories attached to the picturesque fragments of antiquity, and carrying on dialogues between imaginary persons as vivid, if not as forcible, as those of Scott's novels. To this habit—rather inverting the order of cause and effect—he attributes his accuracy of detail. We should rather say that the intensity of the impressions generated both the accuracy and the day-dreams. A philosopher would be arguing in his daily rambles where an imaginative mind is creating a series of pictures. But Macaulay's imagination is as definitely limited as his speculation. The genuine poet is also a philosopher. He sees intuitively what the reasoner evolves by argument. The greatest minds in both classes are equally marked by their naturalisation in the lofty regions of thought, inaccessible or uncongenial to men of inferior stamp. It is tempting in some ways to compare Macaulay to Burke. Burke's superiority is marked by this, that he is primarily a philosopher, and therefore instinctively

sees the illustration of a general law in every particular fact. Macaulay, on the contrary, gets away from theory as fast as possible, and tries to conceal his poverty of thought under masses of ingenious illustration.

His imaginative narrowness would come out still more clearly by a comparison with Carlyle. One significant fact must be enough. Everyone must have observed how powerfully Carlyle expresses the emotion suggested by the brief appearance of some little waif from past history. We may remember, for example, how the usher, De Brézé, appears for a moment to utter the last shriek of the old monarchical etiquette, and then vanishes into the dim abysses of the past. The imagination is excited by the little glimpse of light flashing for a moment upon some special point in the cloudy phantasmagoria of human history. The image of a past existence is projected for a moment upon our eyes, to make us feel how transitory is life, and how rapidly one visionary existence expels another. We are such stuff as dreams are made of :—

> None other than a moving row
> Of visionary shapes that come and go
> Around the sun-illumined lantern held
> In midnight by the master of the show.

Every object is seen against the background of eternal mystery. In Macaulay's pages this element is altogether absent. We see a figure from the past as vividly as if he were present. We observe the details of his dress, the odd oaths with which his discourse is interlarded, the minute peculiarities of his features or manner. We laugh or admire as we should do at a living man ; and we rightly admire the force of the illusion. But the thought never suggests itself that we too are passing into oblivion, that our little island

of daylight will soon be shrouded in the gathering mist, and that we tread at every instant on the dust of forgotten continents. We treat the men of past ages quite at our ease. We applaud and criticise Hampden or Chatham as we should applaud Peel or Cobden. There is no atmospheric effect—no sense of the dim march of ages, or of the vast procession of human life. It is doubtless a great feat to make the past present. It is a greater to emancipate us from the tyranny of the present, and to raise us to a point at which we feel that we too are almost as dreamlike as the men of old time. To gain clearness and definition Macaulay has dropped the element of mystery. He sees perfectly whatever can be seen by the ordinary lawyer, or politician, or merchant; he is insensible to the visions which reveal themselves only to minds haunted by thoughts of eternity, and delighting to dwell in the borderland where dreams blend with realities. Mysticism is to him hateful, and historical figures form groups of individuals, not symbols of forces working behind the veil.

Macaulay, therefore, can be no more a poet in the sense in which the word is applied to Spenser, or to Wordsworth, both of whom he holds to be simply intolerable bores, than he can be a metaphysician or a scientific thinker. In common phraseology, he is a Philistine—a word which I understand properly to denote indifference to the higher intellectual interests. The word may also be defined, however, as the name applied by prigs to the rest of their species. And I hold that the modern fashion of using it as a common term of abuse amounts to a literary nuisance. It enables intellectual coxcombs to brand men with an offensive epithet for being a degree more manly than themselves. There is much that is good in your Philistine; and

when we ask what Macaulay was, instead of showing what he was not, we shall perhaps find that the popular estimate is not altogether wrong.

Macaulay was not only a typical Whig, but the prophet of Whiggism to his generation. Though not a poet or a philosopher, he was a born rhetorician. His parliamentary career proves his capacity sufficiently, though want of the physical qualifications, and of exclusive devotion to political success, prevented him, as perhaps a want of subtlety or flexibility of mind would have always prevented him, from attaining excellence as a debater. In everything that he wrote, however, we see the true rhetorician. He tells us that Fox wrote debates, whilst Mackintosh spoke essays. Macaulay did both. His compositions are a series of orations on behalf of sound Whig views, whatever their external form. Given a certain audience—and every orator supposes a particular audience—their effectiveness is undeniable. Macaulay's may be composed of ordinary Englishmen, with a moderate standard of education. His arguments are adapted to the ordinary Cabinet Minister, or, what is much the same, to the person who is willing to pay a shilling to hear an evening lecture. He can hit an audience composed of such materials—to quote Burke's phrase about George Grenville—'between wind and water.' He uses the language, the logic, and the images which they can fully understand; and though his hearer, like his schoolboy, is ostensibly credited at times with a portentous memory, Macaulay always takes excellent care to put him in mind of the facts which he is assumed to remember. The faults and the merits of his style follow from his resolute determination to be understood of the people. He was specially delighted, as his nephew tells us, by a reader at

Messrs. Spottiswoode's, who said that in all the 'History there was only one sentence the meaning of which was not obvious to him at first sight. We are more surprised that there was one such sentence. Clearness is the first of the cardinal virtues of style; and nobody ever wrote more clearly than Macaulay. He sacrifices much, it is true, in order to obtain it. He proves that two and two make four with a pertinacity which would make him dull, if it were not for his abundance of brilliant illustration. He always remembers the principle which should guide a barrister in addressing a jury. He has not merely to exhibit his proofs, but to hammer them into the heads of his audience by incessant repetition. It is no small proof of artistic skill that a writer who systematically adopts this method should yet be invariably lively. He goes on blacking the chimney with a persistency which somehow amuses us because he puts so much heart into his work. He proves the most obvious truths again and again; but his vivacity never flags. This tendency undoubtedly leads to great defects of style. His sentences are monotonous and mechanical. He has a perfect hatred of pronouns, and for fear of a possible entanglement between 'hims' and 'hers' and 'its,' he will repeat not merely a substantive, but a whole group of substantives. Sometimes, to make his sense unmistakable, he will repeat a whole formula, with only a change in the copula. For the same reason, he hates all qualifications and parentheses. Each thought must be resolved into its constituent parts; each argument must be expressed as a simple proposition: and his paragraphs are rather aggregates of independent atoms than possessed of a continuous unity. His writing—to use a favourite formula of his own—bears the same relation to a style of graceful modulation that a bit

of mosaic work bears to a picture. Each phrase has its distinct hue, instead of melting into its neighbours. Here we have a black patch and there a white. There are no half tones, no subtle interblending of different currents of thought. It is partly for this reason that his descriptions of character are often so unsatisfactory. He likes to represent a man as a bundle of contradictions, because it enables him to obtain startling contrasts. He heightens a vice in one place, a virtue in another, and piles them together in a heap, without troubling himself to ask whether nature can make such monsters, or preserve them if made. To anyone given to analysis, these contrasts are actually painful. There is a story of the Duke of Wellington having once stated that the rats got into his bottles in Spain. 'They must have been very large bottles or very small rats,' said somebody. 'On the contrary,' replied the Duke, 'the rats were very large and the bottles very small.' Macaulay delights in leaving us face to face with such contrasts in more important matters. Boswell must, we would say, have been a clever man or his biography cannot have been so good as you say. On the contrary, says Macaulay, he was the greatest of fools and the best of biographers. He strikes a discord and purposely fails to resolve it. To men of more delicate sensibility the result is an intolerable jar.

For the same reason, Macaulay's genuine eloquence is marred by the symptoms of malice prepense. When he sews on a purple patch, he is resolved that there shall be no mistake about it ; it must stand out from a radical contrast of colours. The emotion is not to swell by degrees, till you find yourself carried away in the torrent which set out as a tranquil stream. The transition is deliberately emphasised. On one side of a full stop you are listening to a matter-of-

fact statement ; on the other, there is all at once a blare of trumpets and a beating of drums, till the crash almost deafens you. He regrets in one of his letters that he has used up the celebrated, and, it must be confessed, really forcible passage about the impeachment scene in Westminster Hall. It might have come in usefully in the 'History,' which, as he then hoped, would reach the time of Warren Hastings. The regret is unpleasantly suggestive of that deliberation in the manufacture of eloquence which stamps it as artificial.

Such faults may annoy critics, even of no very sensitive fibre. What is it that redeems them? The first answer is, that the work is impressive because it is thoroughly genuine. The stream, it is true, comes forth by spasmodic gushes, when it ought to flow in a continuous current ; but it flows from a full reservoir instead of being pumped from a shallow cistern. The knowledge and, what is more, the thoroughly-assimilated knowledge, is enormous. Mr. Trevelyan has shown in detail what we had all divined for ourselves, how much patient labour is often employed in a paragraph or the turn of a phrase. To accuse Macaulay of superficiality is, in this sense, altogether absurd. His speculation may be meagre, but his store of information is simply inexhaustible. Mill's writing was impressive, because one often felt that a single argument condensed the result of a long process of reflection. Macaulay has the lower but similar merit that a single picturesque touch implies incalculable masses of knowledge. It is but an insignificant part of the building which appears above ground. Compare a passage with the assigned authority, and you are inclined to accuse him—sometimes it may be rightfully—of amplifying and modifying. But more often the particular authority is merely the

nucleus round which a whole volume of other knowledge has crystallised. A single hint is significant to a properly-prepared mind of a thousand facts not explicitly contained in it. Nobody, he said, could judge of the accuracy of one part of his 'History' who had not 'soaked his mind with the transitory literature of the day.' His real authority was not this or that particular passage, but a literature. And for this reason alone, Macaulay's historical writings have a permanent value which will prevent them from being superseded even by more philosophical thinkers, whose minds have not undergone the 'soaking' process.

It is significant again that imitations of Macaulay are almost as offensive as imitations of Carlyle. Every great writer has his parasites. Macaulay's false glitter and jingle, his frequent flippancy and superficiality of thought, are more easily caught than his virtues; but so are all faults. Would-be followers of Carlyle catch the strained gestures without the rapture of his inspiration. Would-be followers of Mill fancied themselves to be logical when they were only hopelessly unsympathetic and unimaginative; and would-be followers of some other writers can be effeminate and foppish without being subtle or graceful. Macaulay's thoroughness of work has, perhaps, been less contagious than we could wish. Something of the modern raising of the standard of accuracy in historical inquiry may be set down to his influence. The misfortune is that, if some writers have learnt from him to be flippant without learning to be laborious, others have caught the accuracy without the liveliness. In the later volumes of his 'History,' his vigour began to be a little clogged by the fulness of his knowledge; and we can observe symptoms of the tendency of modern historians to grudge the sacrifice of sifting their

knowledge. They read enough, but instead of giving us the results, they tumble out the accumulated mass of raw materials upon our devoted heads, till they make us long for a fire in the State Paper Office.

Fortunately, Macaulay did not yield to this temptation in his earlier writings, and the result is that he is, for the ordinary reader, one of the two authorities for English history, the other being Shakespeare. Without comparing their merits, we must admit that the compression of so much into a few short narratives shows intensity as well as compass of mind. He could digest as well as devour, and he tried his digestion pretty severely. It is fashionable to say that part of his practical force is due to the training of parliamentary life. Familiarity with the course of affairs doubtless strengthened his insight into history, and taught him the value of downright common-sense in teaching an average audience. Speaking purely from the literary point of view, I cannot agree further in the opinion suggested. I suspect the 'History' would have been better if Macaulay had not been so deeply immersed in all the business of legislation and electioneering. I do not profoundly reverence the House of Commons' tone—even in the House of Commons ; and in literature it easily becomes a nuisance. Familiarity with the actual machinery of politics tends to strengthen the contempt for general principles, of which Macaulay had an ample share. It encourages the illusion of the fly upon the wheel, the doctrine that the dust and din of debate and the worry of lobbies and committee-rooms are not the effect but the cause of the great social movement. The historian of the Roman Empire, as we know, owed something to the captain of Hampshire Militia ; but years of life absorbed in parliamentary wrangling and in sitting at

the feet of the philosophers of Holland House were not likely to widen a mind already disposed to narrow views of the world.

For Macaulay's immediate success, indeed, the training was undoubtedly valuable. As he carried into Parliament the authority of a great writer, so he wrote books with the authority of the practical politician. He has the true instinct of affairs. He knows what are the immediate motives which move masses of men; and is never misled by fanciful analogies or blindfolded by the pedantry of official language. He has seen flesh-and-blood statesmen—at any rate, English statesmen—and understands the nature of the animal. Nobody can be freer from the dominion of crotchets. All his reasoning is made of the soundest common-sense, and represents, if not the ultimate forces, yet forces with which we have to reckon. And he knows, too, how to stir the blood of the average Englishman. He understands most thoroughly the value of concentration, unity, and simplicity. Every speech or essay forms an artistic whole, in which some distinct moral is vigorously driven home by a succession of downright blows. This strong rhetorical instinct is shown conspicuously in the 'Lays of Ancient Rome,' which, whatever we might say of them as poetry, are an admirable specimen of rhymed rhetoric. We know how good they are when we see how incapable are modern ballad-writers in general of putting the same swing and fire into their verses. Compare, for example, Aytoun's 'Lays of the Cavaliers,' as the most obvious parallel :—

> Not swifter pours the avalanche
> Adown the steep incline,
> That rises o'er the parent springs
> Of rough and rapid Rhine,

than certain Scotch heroes over an entrenchment. Place this mouthing by any parallel passage in Macaulay :—

> Now, by our sire Quirinus,
> It was a goodly sight
> To see the thirty standards
> Swept down the tide of flight.
> So flies the spray in Adria
> When the black squall doth blow.
> So corn-sheaves in the flood time
> Spin down the whirling Po.

And so on in verses which innumerable schoolboys of inferior pretensions to Macaulay's know by heart. And in such cases the verdict of the schoolboy is perhaps more valuable than that of the literary connoisseur. There are, of course, many living poets who can do tolerably something of far higher quality which Macaulay could not do at all. But I don't know who, since Scott, could have done this particular thing. Possibly Mr. Kingsley might have approached it, or the poet, if he would have condescended so far, who sang the bearing of the good news from Ghent to Aix. In any case, the feat is significant of Macaulay's true power. It looks easy; it involves no demands upon the higher reasoning or imaginative powers: but nobody will believe it to be easy who observes the extreme rarity of a success in a feat so often attempted.

A similar remark is suggested by Macaulay's 'Essays.' Read such an essay as that upon Clive, or Warren Hastings, or Chatham. The story seems to tell itself. The characters are so strongly marked, the events fall so easily into their places, that we fancy that the narrator's business has been done to his hand. It wants little critical experience to discover that this massive simplicity is really indicative of an art not, it may be, of the highest order, but

truly admirable for its purpose. It indicates not only a gigantic memory, but a glowing mind, which has fused a crude mass of materials into unity. If we do not find the sudden touches which reveal the philosophical sagacity or the imaginative insight of the highest order of intellects, we recognise the true rhetorical instinct. The outlines may be harsh, and the colours too glaring; but the general effect has been carefully studied. The details are wrought in with consummate skill. We indulge in an intercalary pish! here and there; but we are fascinated and we remember. The actual amount of intellectual force which goes to the composition of such written archives is immense, though the quality may leave something to be desired. Shrewd common-sense may be an inferior substitute for philosophy, and the faculty which brings remote objects close to the eye of an ordinary observer for the loftier faculty which tinges everyday life with the hues of mystic contemplation. But when the common faculties are present in so abnormal a degree, they begin to have a dignity of their own.

It is impossible in such matters to establish any measure of comparison. No analysis will enable us to say how much pedestrian capacity may be fairly regarded as equivalent to a small capacity for soaring above the solid earth, and therefore the question as to the relative value of Macaulay's work and that of some men of loftier aims and less perfect execution must be left to individual taste. We can only say that it is something so to have written the history of many national heroes as to make their faded glories revive to active life in the memory of their countrymen. So long as Englishmen are what they are—and they don't seem to change as rapidly as might be wished—they will turn to

Macaulay's pages to gain a vivid impression of our greatest achievements during an important period.

Nor is this all. The fire which glows in Macaulay's history, the intense patriotic feeling, the love of certain moral qualities, is not altogether of the highest kind. His ideal of national and individual greatness might easily be criticised. But the sentiment, as far as it goes, is altogether sound and manly. He is too fond, it has been said, of incessant moralising. From a scientific point of view the moralising is irrelevant. We want to study the causes and the nature of great social movements ; and when we are stopped in order to inquire how far the prominent actors in them were hurried beyond ordinary rules, we are transported into a different order of thought. It would be as much to the purpose if we approved an earthquake for upsetting a fort, and blamed it for moving the foundations of a church. Macaulay can never understand this point of view. With him, history is nothing more than a sum of biographies. And even from a biographical point of view his moralising is often troublesome. He not only insists upon transporting party prejudice into his estimates, and mauls poor James II. as he mauled the Tories in 1832 ; but he applies obviously inadequate tests. It is absurd to call upon men engaged in a life-and-death wrestle to pay scrupulous attention to the ordinary rules of politeness. There are times when judgments guided by constitutional precedent become ludicrously out of place, and when the best man is he who aims straightest at the heart of his antagonist. But, in spite of such drawbacks, Macaulay's genuine sympathy for manliness and force of character generally enables him to strike pretty nearly the true note. To learn the true secret of Cromwell's character we must go to Carlyle, who can sympathise with

deep currents of religious enthusiasm. Macaulay retains too much of the old Whig distrust for all that it calls fanaticism fully to recognise the grandeur beneath the grotesque outside of the Puritan. But Macaulay tells us most distinctly why Englishmen warm at the name of the great Protector. We, like the banished Cavaliers, 'glow with an emotion of national pride' at his animated picture of the unconquerable Ironsides. One phrase may be sufficiently illustrative. After quoting Clarendon's story of the Scotch nobleman who forced Charles to leave the field of Naseby by seizing his horse's bridle, 'no man,' says Macaulay, 'who had much value for his life would have tried to perform the same friendly office on that day for Oliver Cromwell.'

Macaulay, in short, always feels, and therefore communicates, a hearty admiration for sheer manliness. And some of his portraits of great men have therefore a genuine power, and show the deeper insight which comes from true sympathy. He estimates the respectable observer of constitutional proprieties too highly; he is unduly repelled by the external oddities of the truly masculine and noble Johnson; but his enthusiasm for his pet hero, William, or for Chatham or Clive, carries us along with him. And at moments when he is narrating their exploits, and can forget his elaborate argumentations and refrain from bits of deliberate bombast, the style becomes graphic in the higher sense of a much-abused word, and we confess that we are listening to genuine eloquence. Putting aside for the moment recollection of foibles, almost too obvious to deserve the careful demonstration which they have sometimes received, we are glad to surrender ourselves to the charm of his straightforward, clear-headed, hard-hitting declamation. There is no writer with whom it is easier to find fault, or

the limits of whose power may be more distinctly defined ; but within his own sphere he goes forward, as he went through life, with a kind of grand confidence in himself and his cause, which is attractive, and at times even provocative of sympathetic enthusiasm.

Macaulay said, in his Diary, that he wrote his 'History' with an eye to a remote past and a remote future. He meant to erect a monument more enduring than brass, and the ambition at least stimulated him to admirable thoroughness of workmanship. How far his aim was secured must be left to the decision of a posterity which will not trouble itself about the susceptibilities of candidates for its favour. In one sense, however, Macaulay must be interesting so long as the type which he so fully represents continues to exist. Whig has become an old-fashioned phrase, and is repudiated by modern Liberals and Radicals, who think themselves wiser than their fathers. The decay of the old name implies a remarkable political change ; but I doubt whether it implies more than a very superficial change in the national character. New classes and new ideas have come upon the stage ; but they have a curious family likeness to the old. The Whiggism whose peculiarities Macaulay reflected so faithfully represents some of the most deeply-seated tendencies of the national character. It has, therefore, both its ugly and its honourable side. Its disregard, or rather its hatred, for pure reason, its exaltation of expediency above truth and precedent above principle, its instinctive dread of strong religious or political faiths, are of course questionable qualities. Yet even they have their nobler side. There is something almost sublime about the grand unreasonableness of the average Englishman. His dogged contempt for all

foreigners and philosophers, his intense resolution to have his own way and use his own eyes, to see nothing that does not come within his narrow sphere of vision, and to see it quite clearly before he acts upon it, are of course abhorrent to thinkers of a different order. But they are great qualities in the struggle for existence which must determine the future of the world. The Englishman, armed in his panoply of self-content, and grasping facts with unequalled tenacity, goes on trampling upon acuter sensibilities, but somehow shouldering his way successfully through the troubles of the universe. Strength may be combined with stupidity, but even then it is not to be trifled with. Macaulay's sympathy with these qualities led to some annoying peculiarities, to a certain brutal insularity, and to a commonness, sometimes a vulgarity, of style which is easily criticised. But, at least, we must confess that, to use an epithet which always comes up in speaking of him, he is a thoroughly manly writer. There is nothing silly or finical about him. He sticks to his colours resolutely and honourably. If he flatters his countrymen, it is the unconscious and spontaneous effect of his participation in their weaknesses. He never knowingly calls black white, or panders to an ungenerous sentiment. He is combative to a fault, but his combativeness is allied to a genuine love of fair-play. When he hates a man, he calls him knave or fool with unflinching frankness, but he never uses a base weapon. The wounds which he inflicts may hurt, but they do not fester. His patriotism may be narrow, but it implies faith in the really good qualities, the manliness, the spirit of justice, and the strong moral sense of his countrymen. He is proud of the healthy vigorous stock from which he springs ; and the fervour of his enthusiasm, though it may shock a delicate taste, has

embodied itself in writings which will long continue to be the typical illustration of qualities of which we are all proud at bottom indeed, be it said in passing, a good deal too proud.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME

PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
LONDON